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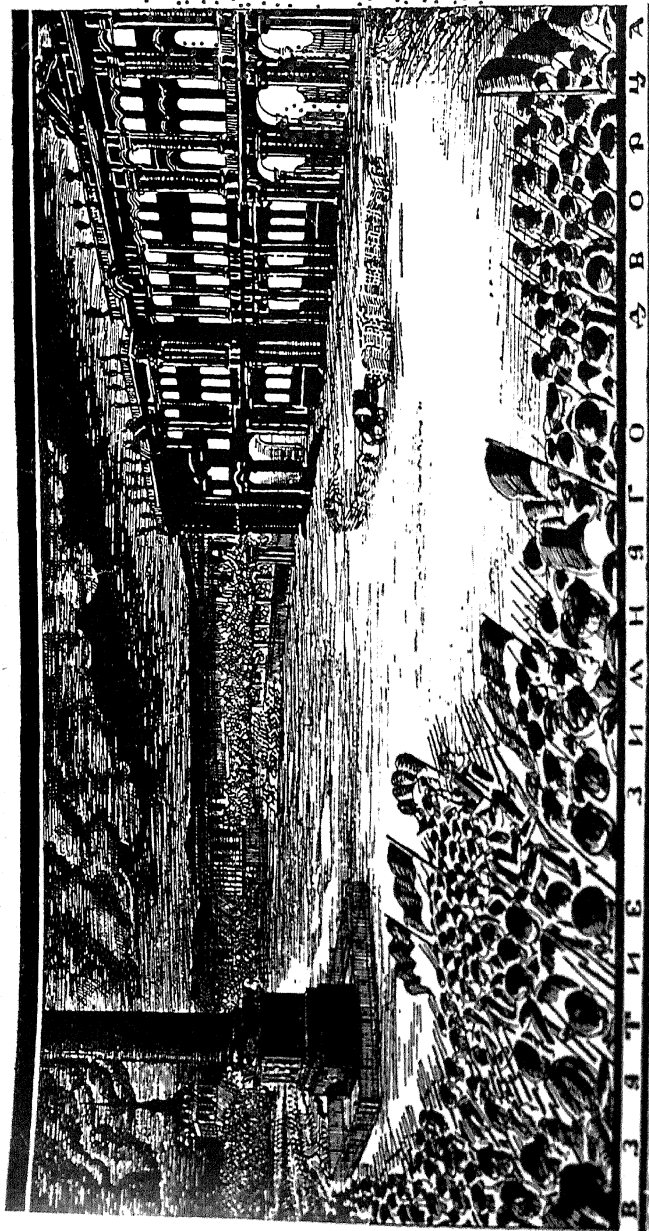


# THE NEW THEATRE AND CINEMA OF SOVIET RUSSIA









THE STORMING OF THE WINTER PALACE, 25 NOVEMBER, 1917.

This marks the beginning of the New Theatre. The theme of the depicting of Kerensky and the overthrowing of Lenin has since become that of a political mystery drama-play. The performance takes place in the open square with the palace as an architectural background. Russian people take part in it. 1897.

B 3 4 T M E 3 M A H 3 F O A B O P U A



# THE NEW THEATRE AND CINEMA OF SOVIET RUSSIA: HUNTLY CARTER



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## PREFACE

THE aim of this book is to analyse and synthesise the theatre which has been established in Soviet Russia since the Russian Revolution of 1917, and which is the direct outcome of that world-influencing event.

No other country has developed a theatre so new and so strong, so life-centred and so unified, yet so varied in human interest as that of Soviet Russia. This theatre expresses more clearly and more forcibly than any other popular institution in Russia the Russian state of mind and its present amazing revolutionary exaltation, as we might say, and its efforts to create a new culture, new human relations, new conditions of life, new crystallisation of labour and thought. The Revolution has produced a new vision of Russia, a passion of life, a power of evocation, and it has set the People in the Workers free to express these in the form most agreeable to them. The form is a dramatic one. The theatre in which the new dramatic motive must find expression is as yet in its infancy, as yet practically unknown outside Russia, but it promises to attain a maturity and recognition full of rich inspiration for Western Europe and America, where at present there are no changes or developments corresponding to those of the theatrical movement in Russia. The new motive is, briefly, industrial civilisation. The new theatre in Russia is the means by which the meaning of this civilisation, which has hardly touched Russia, is being expressed. Already in this theatre the new power of Labour is realising, explaining and making itself known.

The cause of the theatre, its historical limitations, conception, organisation, methods and technical limitations, new traditions, spiritual, economic and social significance, its utopianism—all these deserve to be known and studied.

As far as I know there is no book in existence which fully

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deals with this theatre, explains what it is, its actuality and possibility. Indeed, the literature of the new theatre can hardly be said to have made a beginning, if we except the quantity of theoretical matter which has been published in the Proletcult Bulletins and Workers' journals in Russia since 1917. Existing books on the Russian theatre stop with the winter of 1917-18, at a period when the Revolution had made no perceptible difference in the organisation and work of the established theatres. A book of the kind has recently been published in revised form, but it really adds very little to what it said when it first appeared years ago.

It is noteworthy that reviewers of this book invariably deal with its contents as though the latter were a record of the Russian theatre of to-day, instead of being a record of the theatre during the winter of 1917-18, before the Revolution had had any effect on the established playhouses. Thus a reviewer in the *Manchester Guardian*, when dealing with the book, observes that the author<sup>1</sup> "brings under review every phase of theatrical art in Petrograd and Moscow, from the austerities of the Moscow Art Theatre to the modern exuberance of the Kamerny and the inspired vaudeville of the Bat." The writer means every phase of the 1917-18 theatres. The Bat theatre no longer exists in Moscow. Bailieff, its one-time director, is in America. The Moscow Art Theatre is old-fashioned, and the exuberance of the Kamerny began in 1914. The reason for this error is that the reviewers have not been to Russia recently, and owing to the fact that news from Russia has been so unreliable as to be a scandal, there is no data to show what the theatre in Soviet Russia is like to-day, they are compelled to base their comments and opinions on out-of-date information. We have no reliable facts and figures to prove that the Russian people are actually building a theatre for their own use which differs as much from the 1917-18 one as Heaven from Hades, and in which they are seeking to express a better form comparatively of civilisation than the one the Revolution set out to destroy. Article after article, review after review have appeared in the newspaper and periodical press. Books have poured from the publishing houses in an unending stream—books on Bolshevist politics, Bolshevist economics, Bolshevist morals, Bolshevist social life

<sup>1</sup> 'Manchester Guardian.'

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—some of them instructive, most of them worthless, some by writers who know the country well, others by writers like Mr. H. G. Wells who have paid it one flying visit of a fortnight. For the most part they testify to one thing. Russia is in political and economic agony. The agony of Russia is indeed a matter that absorbs the attention of St. Stephen's and the Stock Exchange. Of course, books of this kind have no space for the true Resurrection and Transfiguration of Russia as reflected by its new cultural institutions, foremost among them the new theatre. Indeed, they come to bury Russia, not to raise it.

The responsible papers which occasionally speak on behalf of Russia do not contribute anything towards a knowledge of the subject. A few months ago when I was in Moscow I wrote to the editor of *The Observer*, Mr. J. L. Garvin, offering to send him an account of the work of the New Theatre. I did so because I had noticed that he gave a generous amount of space in his paper to a consideration of the work of the continental theatres. Mr. Garvin sent me a perfectly courteous reply, saying that he was instructing his Moscow correspondent to send news of the theatre, and he could not accept my offer without risk of such news being duplicated. I was very glad to hear of his intention, and watched his paper week by week hoping to find that my effort to stir up interest in the New Theatre had resulted in a fruitful stream of information. But I got nothing for my trouble. Except a short paragraph announcing the performances of some unimportant plays not a word on the Moscow theatres appeared.

The same may be said of visitors to Russia, even those who have made a number of lengthy visits. If they happen to be unsympathetic, their talk is all of the dire effects of the war, revolution, civil war, pestilence, famine and what not. If they are sympathisers they praise the Government and Workers, and do what they can to influence foreign capital and concessions. Of the fresh culture which has arisen, of the New Theatre, with its humanising and maybe spiritualising interpretations, they say little or are as dumb as Eve when she plucked the apple. For instance, we have Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy. He visits Russia for two months. He sees it making remarkable progress towards recovery in spite of what it has suffered at the

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hands of capitalist and militarist nations, and in spite of the difficulties surrounding its attempt at a daring experiment in a new form of government. He tells us he saw no prostitutes, and no drunkards. This kind of myopia is common to a certain class of visitor to Russia. His observations on the absence of other demoralising factors are equally startling. After several columns of inspired optimism of the kind, he sums up with a brief note on the theatre. Here it is.<sup>1</sup> "The theatre, drama, opera, ballet are flourishing. The ballet as an artistic spectacle is unequalled anywhere else in Europe or, I believe, in America. I visited a dozen theatres, cabarets, music-halls of all kinds from the largest to the smallest, and never once saw anything vulgar or indecent. So far as I can judge, any child could be taken to any theatre in Moscow or Petrograd without fear of contamination. This cannot be said of either London, Paris or Berlin."

It is true there are many references in foreign books and newspapers, especially German, to the new Russian theatre. But they are for the most part scrappy and of no value for enabling one to compose a comprehensive picture of the conception, organisation and work of this theatre. In 1922 Monsieur E. Herriot, Mayor of Lyon, visited Russia for the purpose of reporting on the situation. The result was a volume called<sup>2</sup> "*La Russie Nouvelle*." Of its 302 pages, two were devoted to "*Les theatres*," all of which went to show that the opera was flourishing, that at one time seats were free, and that the performance of "*Carmen*" with futurist decorations by Fedorovsky, pupil of Bakst, pleased M. Herriot very much. In the autumn of 1920 Mr. Henry Brailsford spent two months in Russia. Throughout the book<sup>3</sup> which he produced as a result of his visit, he suggests that something new of a theatrical character was coming out of the new life. But nowhere does he attempt to describe the experiments that were being made. That he noticed them is clear from his own words, "all manner of experiments are in fashion." Elsewhere he remarks, "all this experimental art left me personally cold." The admission, of course, accounts for much. It probably means that Mr. Brailsford did not understand it, and therefore he was unable

<sup>1</sup> "Foreign Affairs," July, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> "*La Russie Nouvelle*." E. Herriot.

<sup>3</sup> "The Russian Workers' Republic." H. N. Brailsford.

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to explain it for the benefit of those who could not visit Russia

It may be that the privileged persons who have visited Russia since the Revolution are not capable of appreciating and explaining the New Theatre. Russia is not an open country, and the Russian Government are very particular who they admit. They seem to prefer politicians, economists and social reformers to writers concerned with culture-developments. Certainly I have never met any newspaper men in Moscow, Petrograd or elsewhere who showed the slightest appreciation of the theatre. At the same time it should be said that there are very few English newspaper men in Russia. Lieutenant Commander Kenworthy, in the aforementioned article, says that when he "was in Moscow there was not a single British newspaper correspondent, with the exception of two very able Englishmen who were representing American journals." Mr. Arthur Ransome, a correspondent of the "Manchester Guardian," who lives at a little seaside village some distance from Reval, in Esthonia, and visits Russia occasionally, so far as I know, has never discovered an appreciation of the New Theatre. Mr. Michael Farbman, who writes for the Russian and English newspapers, particularly "The Observer," completely ignores it. I once met him in a Moscow theatre watching a daring experiment. He was looking as bewildered as a pea-weevil that has just given birth to a porpoise and does not know what to make of it. The absence of English pressmen from Russia has been noticed by more than one writer. Mr. Walter Duranty, sometime Paris correspondent of "The Outlook," London, and now Moscow correspondent of the "New York Times," said, in September, 1922, "that besides himself there was not a single other correspondent of any English newspaper or periodical stationed in Russia at that time."<sup>1</sup> There are many reasons why English pressmen are absent. One is that Russia is a long way off. Another, it is very difficult to get there. And a third is that the Russian Government are not very anxious to admit them. During one of my post-Revolution visits I learnt that I was the only English press representative in Moscow.

Unlike the few English pressmen who I have met from time

<sup>1</sup> "The Outlook," London.

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to time in Russia, I was properly equipped to estimate the new experiments in the theatre. I had an intimate knowledge of all sides of the theatre gained from many years experience as actor, producer, playwright; author of progressive works on the theatre, and international drama; and drama and art critic and editor. Moreover, I had the advantage of having formed a definite conception of the Theatre—what it is and means, and what human beings want of it. For this reason I never went to Soviet Russia without asking myself the questions: What does the Theatre mean to the Russian people? What do they want of it?

It is not unreasonable to say that the New Russian Theatre requires, more than any other theatre, a special equipment to understand it. This theatre reflects a change corresponding to the change in Russia itself and the entire life of the Russian people. I mean scientific knowledge remodelling industry and society. The "literary" dramatic critic bred by the literary movement in the Continental theatre during the past twenty-five years would not understand it in the least. When he came to apply his literary standards to its plays and acting—standards alone suitable to judge the Christy Minstrel method of theatrical interpretation common to the English theatre, he would be hopelessly at sea. He would find that he was no longer concerned with the qualities of diction, and the fitness of epigrams, the general logic of speech. He would find that he had no measure for the chief theatrical idea of the new Russian theatre, which resides in a great belief in body and brain disciplined action, in improvisation, in a combination of mimicry and neo-realism. He would find that the Revolution has destroyed literary methods, and brought to the front a new body of actors who act creatively and refuse to be actuated by the fossil ideas coming from the training academies, the libraries and museums of pre-war Russia and Western Europe and America. He would find that the men of the new theatre are engaged with the technical question of how best to raise the level of average interpretative power, and with it that of acting achievement. This means that they repudiate in the strongest possible way any claim on the part of speech alone, no matter how literary in its flavour, to take complete possession of the stage. They have no use for the drill-sergeant and the gramo-



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phone employed in England's theatrical factories by so-called progressive producers. Likewise the stage-craft critic called forth by the attempt to convert the stage into an experimental studio for painters of easel pictures and designers of fancy linoleum would be out of it. The young Russians are engaged clearing away the pictorial scene and its dead lumber and weeds. In Russia æsthetic is dead and truth prevails. To them lighting and scenic effects are the least important parts of play representation. They believe the constructive actor who can surround himself with his own intensity comes first. They have come to the conclusion that the constructive scene is next. By "constructive scene" they mean one that intensifies acting and not merely hangs "decorations" on it. As to that scribbling phenomenon, the play critic bred by the commercial or shopkeeper theatre, he would be not only at sea but beneath it. Accustomed to estimate and appraise setting and properties supplied by leading firms, as fully advertised in the program-catalogue, he would find no news items about goods, firms and persons in a theatre based on primitive laws indeed, but not pretending to be a legacy from the early Phœnicians. He would discover that to test the work of a human theatre with the rules and standards it requires is a far different thing from producing the mischievous and unwholesome lucubrations demanded by a commercial enterprise run by syndicates of stock-jobbers, race-horse owners, and all sorts of speculators and gamblers, who aim solely to drain the pockets of a section of the public suffering from lassitude and sexual insanity. In short, criticism of the theatre evoked by the Revolution must lean heavily on the idea of a race of comparatively primitive people unfolding under the touch of a shattering life-centred experience which does not demand academical or shopkeeper forms of criticism. The Theatre has assumed a new form in Russia. It is advancing a new principle and has a higher aim. Criticism must do likewise. It must interpret a new vision of unfolding life and mind as expressed by the Russian theatre.

Besides the difficulty of obtaining adequate accounts of the New Russian Theatre, due to the fact that properly equipped critics do not visit Soviet Russia, there is the difficulty caused by the fact that no insurgent part of the New Theatre has visited Western Europe or America. Only academic theatrical

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companies, including those of the Moscow art theatre and the more radical Kamerny theatres, have been seen out of Russia. The extreme companies, those that are developing new technical ideas belonging to the machine factory world and in the inseparability of the theatre and life, are not allowed to leave Russia. Their plays are so bound up with political and revolutionary propaganda—from which, by the way, plays presented on tour by the Moscow Art Theatre company are not entirely free—and the desire to laugh at the bourgeois thought and action of Western countries that they would not be tolerated out of Russia. But the work of these companies, as a whole, contain many uplifting and formidable spiritual and technical ideas which can be separated from revolutionary politics and propaganda. These ideas belong to theatrical advance, and for this reason, if for no other, demand and deserve to be widely seen and studied.

A book is needed then to explain and introduce these ideas to the English theatre, especially at a moment when Labour need to advertise their new power, all seriously concerned with this theatre<sup>1</sup> “are now in the throes of a great argument about scenery and methods of production,” when<sup>2</sup> “all over England there are little bodies of men and women making theatres for themselves.” When there is great revival in the subject of a National Theatre<sup>3</sup> “which nothing can prevent our having within the next ten, possibly five years.” And when we read such announcements in the responsible press as<sup>4</sup> “A company is being formed for the establishment of the Forum Theatre, whose artistic management will be in the hands of Mr. Theodore Kommissarzhevsky and Mr. Allan Wade, at a well-known West-End theatre.”

Such a book would be one step at least in the adventure towards a good theatre in England. I say one step, because I am fully aware there are others to be found in the new directions taken and the intensity of experiment and achievement appearing in different parts of the continent. Such sources of inspiration are waiting to make themselves felt in England, but

<sup>1</sup> Mr. St. John Ervine, “Observer,” 19.8.'23.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. John Masefield, preface to “Scene” (Gordon Craig).

<sup>3</sup> Mr. W. J. Turner. “New Statesman.” 28.7.'23.

<sup>4</sup> Lord Howard de Walden. Letter to the “Outlook.” 28.7.'23.

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for the moment are prevented by insurmountable economic and other circumstances from doing so. This brings me to an old subject, one I frequently wrote about before the war when I was international drama and art critic and editor of the "New Age." I mean the need of good books on the theatre. The need was pressing then; it is pressing now. In 1914 Mr. Gordon Craig wrote a long letter to the "Manchester Playgoer," a theatrical monthly edited by Mr. R. O. Drey, a business-man interested in the theatre and art. The letter was entitled, "In Defence of the 'Mask' and Mr. Huntly Carter," and was in answer to a violent attack by Mr. John Palmer, who at the time was engaged writing overwrought articles on the theatre for the "Saturday Review." After defending the "Mask" the letter went on to say: "And now regarding your dislike of Mr. Huntly Carter's plucky attempt (and in many ways a highly successful one) to bring before the English public something of the truth concerning the continental branches of the awakening European theatre.

"I must say, your dislike for his book is hard to understand. A man can only do his best, and when such a difficult task to perform as this self-appointed task which Mr. Carter undertook, and which everybody else shirked on account of its difficulty, then I think that man deserves a good deal of praise.

"Consider what it means, wandering from city to city, town to town in Europe, from Berlin to Munich, Munich to Budapest, then on to Moscow and Petrograd, back to Warsaw, and so on to Paris, gathering information all the time, while the difficulties instead of decreasing increase day by day—travelling without introduction from 'the heads of profession,' with precious little cash in the pocket, and no encouragement whatever from home—why, my dear sir, I call that one of the pluckiest things that we have heard of for a long time in the English theatrical world.

"The book is stocked with informing and interesting pictures and details galore as to how the different theatres are managed. I am of the opinion that though many critics will be in haste to condemn it, most of them will at leisure avail themselves of everything it contains. This first book of Mr. Carter's is exactly what we wanted, and we want more such books; we want books by all the critics—after they have made

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the same tour that Mr. Carter made. If their different journals won't commission them, let any critic of independence prove himself by making the tour as Mr. Carter did. The excuse that they can't afford it will no longer hold water. In the matter of information concerning developments taking place every six months in the foreign theatres, we are generally three years behind the times; always eighteen months. Foreign correspondents of the different journals cannot be reasonably expected to be thorough enough judges in so special a matter."

The book to which Mr. Craig refers as " my first book " is the " New Spirit in Drama and Art." It aimed to describe the new vision of, and the intense movement towards synthesis in the European theatres. In all the great cities I visited I saw men of the theatre endeavouring to unify life and art forms. It was a pioneering book which practically discovered the new European synthetic theatre to the young men of America and had the effect of sending many of them, as well as English actor-managers, among them Sir Herbert Tree, and producers to Moscow and other cities to see for themselves some of the facts which I had recorded, especially those concerning the organisation of the Moscow Art Theatre, which at that time was practically unknown to England and America. This form of pioneering I have pursued uninterruptedly ever since. From 1914 to 1918 I was never out of the danger zone in England and France and elsewhere on the continent. During the whole period I kept a close observation of the work of the theatres, and collected invaluable comparative records which I hope may see the light of publication some day. Since the Armistice I have spent many months each year in European countries in travail, including Soviet Russia, combining with my press work the study of the theatres of various countries and their change under the touch of great disaster, civil war, famine, blockade, bankruptcy, disease, destitution. I have done so under similar conditions to those described by Mr. Craig, that is, conditions in which I have received no assistance except from European theatrical directors, who have provided me with information concerning their theatres; and no reward except the intense pleasure of being engaged in a task to which one is passionately attached and, moreover, which is absolutely necessary. For

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like Mr. Craig, I regard the theatre as something more than a centre of idle amusement. To me it is an instrument for projecting the human soul into space in such a way that all who see it are initiated into its eternal truths. This way of initiation need not be difficult, irksome or dull. If taken through the play-spirit which resides in every human being, it might easily be filled with gaiety and laughter. Then the theatre stripped bare to its true, its simplest term, becomes—a playground.

The present book is then the latest record of my pioneering adventures and perhaps the most fruitful one. At the same time its production has been a self-appointed task, full of greater difficulties than any task preceding it. For one thing, a visit to Russia is still somewhat of an adventure full of awkward moments. The journey is long, eventful and exceedingly uncomfortable. Life in Russia is also very uncomfortable. Although improvement has set in, there is still an absence of ordinary conveniences which makes living anything but enjoyable. In Moscow there is no street lighting, in many thoroughfares there are not ten consecutive feet of pavement without a hole large enough to fall into, and in the hot season torrential downpours are frequent, and the street transport is chaotic. Theatre-going under these conditions is little else than a martyrdom. In the matter of receiving help from official quarters in my inquiries into the work of the different theatres I had a great deal to complain of. The directors of the theatres and their subordinates made frequent promises of assistance, but they never kept them. It may have been that they shared the fear which appears to be general, of giving information to strangers. Or it may have been that everyone is overworked; everyone has to work for their living, and no one has a moment to spare for any purpose except that of earning bread and butter. Or it may be that, as an American writer has observed, the Russians are by nature dilatory. Provided with strong letters of introduction he went to Moscow in the winter of 1917-18 to write an account of the Russian theatre. He spent 3,000 dollars, and he had the active assistance of a prominent Russian dramatic critic. Even then and under the most favourable circumstances he had to complain severely of the difficulty of getting information. Other explanations might be found in the peculiar psychology of the Russians as referred to

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by Scheffer and Hanotaux.<sup>1</sup> Another circumstance that operated against me was that during my last visit a quarrel with England took place. There was an intense wave of anti-English feeling, and everyone shut up like oysters whenever I asked for information. I also found it very difficult to get illustrations of the most recent ideas, because theatrical managers were too poor to have photographs taken. I was compelled either to take some myself or to pay fabulous sums to private persons who had received special permission to take some. I say all this not in a boasting spirit, but as evidence that I have taken a good deal of trouble to arrive at the truths concerning the advance of the theatre. "We want more good books on the theatre," says Mr. Craig. Such books are not to be obtained without trouble. And they are worth the trouble

<sup>1</sup> "Manchester Guardian," Reconstruction Supplement. 6.7.'22 and 18.5.'22.

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## CHAPTER I

### *THE ORIGIN OF THE NEW THEATRE*

A NEW theatre of great importance, and very advanced tendencies is seeking to establish itself in Soviet Russia. It is a People's theatre in the fullest sense. And it manifests perhaps for the first time in history, the mind of the people actuated by an overwhelming desire to find a way out of the confusion caused by centuries of wrong thinking, to a fuller, freer and more tolerable mode of life. In order to understand this theatre it is necessary to examine the influences that produced it.

This new theatre is the outcome of Revolution, Recognition and Response. It is a veritable child of the 1917 Russian Revolution. In many ways it is more definitely an offspring of Revolution than any other theatre which has been shaped by revolutionary political events. The French Revolution turned the French theatre into a political forum. The American Revolution turned the American theatre into a forum for the discussion of its own pros and cons. The German Revolution of 1919 greatly helped the popular movement in the German theatre. It hastened the transition from Court to People's playhouses, and it produced greater freedom of expression. It released rebellious producers and writers from the restraint the Monarchy had laid upon them, and in this and other ways provided an outlet for the revolutionary ardour of classics and moderns in plays of revolt written before the War and the Revolution and of actual experience of the Revolution. Schiller, Hauptmann, and Wedekind, no less than Walter Hasenclever, Fritz von Unruh, Kaiser, Ernst Toller, and other young insurgents went "red," as it were. But in these three cases Revolution had an ephemeral effect. It exerted no permanent

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influence. And the best proof of this may be found by a consideration of the present-day springs of the theatres in question. Above the American theatre proudly floats the "Stars" and Dollars. Round the French theatre the heavy exhalation of salacity hangs like a halo. The German theatre—the one theatre which has moved with greatest dignity throughout the war and since—is clinging to reaction. Still the revolutionary impulse in Germany has not completely passed away, and no one can say with certainty what further effects it may have upon the theatre. But it can be said with certainty that nothing that is likely to happen in the German theatre will change it as completely as the 1917 Revolution has changed the Russian theatre; or, more correctly, the 1917 Revolution and the rebellions which immediately preceded it.

Actually the new Russian theatre was promised by earlier political events. The working-class theatrical movement started in 1905, during the Japanese war and the first Revolution, when it was largely the outcome of a desire on the part of the workers to express their ideas about industrial and social life as they believed it should be lived. The aim of the movement during the first Revolution was propaganda—to circulate (1) ideas of the Revolution, (2) to educate, (3) to amuse. So in many ways the earlier revolutionary waves exerted a powerful influence on the theatrical movement that reappeared in 1917. One effect was to encourage the workers to express themselves freely in club and other theatres, and so to lay the foundation of a theatre for their own use. But as each revolutionary wave receded so the currents of free expression were driven beneath the surface by the imperialistic authorities. Here they remained flowing on unaltered by the material forces at the surface, ready to reappear at the first favourable moment.

Then came the Great Revolution and its promises.

What were the promises made by the Great Revolution? To all sections of the working-class, workers, peasants, soldiers? To the bourgeoisie, the old Tsarists, to the intelligentsia, to the students—to all who sympathised with the workers' ideas and ideals? The two most significant promises were liberation and self-ownership. The workman was to have the factory, the peasant to have the land, the soldier was to have peace, to be

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freed from the contempt of his fellow-creatures, to cease fighting for fighting's sake, only to maintain military conditions in case of need and for purely national purposes. All three were to have the ownership of their bodies, of their minds and souls so far as these could be transferred by industrialism from one set of owners, the capitalists, to another set of owners, the peasants', workers' and soldiers' Soviets. In any case, all three were to be men and not machines. So the Revolution promised to make the Russian people free citizens instead of enslaved subjects, and to give the new body of citizens a freer life than the Russian people ever had enjoyed. They were to be free, for instance, to make a theatre of their own—not one roofed-in structure, but a network of theatres and open spaces where the people could run riot with their own play-spirit and natural theatrical and dramatic resources, without the need of money and without social distinctions.

How were the promises received? This will be told in subsequent chapters. All that need be said here is that thanks to the fact that the Russian people are innately intensely dramatic; thanks to the lingering traditions of dramatic self-help and voluntary co-operation in theatricals, bred by the old landowners in the serfs; thanks to the social and industrial unrest of the workers; thanks to the action of Foreign Powers which isolated Russia and made it a communist State surrounded by hostile capitalist States; thanks to the idea of world revolution which has been nursed throughout by certain Soviet leaders in spite of its apparent impracticability; thanks to the tremendous political events to which this obstinacy has given rise, for six long years the world has witnessed a rare sight. Russia has appeared in dramatic form. All its great cities—Moscow, Petrograd, and the rest—have simply overflowed with dramatic expression. The dramatic expression in Moscow, for instance, has been amazing. Here the population have been quickened to such a degree that the city has resembled a human volcano in eruption. For many a day its streets have been running with molten human lava, in the form of demonstrations, parades, pageants, festivals, while its air has been dense with banners and festoons and cries. In such unending excitement and uplift the new population have expressed themselves in that dramatic form which is innate in human beings, and is

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unique in the history of the human race. Here we have a people unfolding under the touch of political, patriotic and national influences. And under these influences the principles of art have come into full play. Simplicity, concentration and improvisation have done their part so well that the primary aim of all participating in these exhibitions has been not to uphold political events, but to express themselves. This is civic life in dramatic form. Never before, perhaps, has citizenship reached a dramatic expression so vast and complete.

How were the promises performed? The most important immediate effect is the release of the workers, peasants and soldiers from the paralysing restraint that the old regime placed upon them. The Revolution has also released certain insurgent writers and artists from the Tsarist censorship, and has led many Tsarist writers and artists to join them. It has given a great impetus to original forms of thought and action. By uplifting the workers into a new race, as it were, it has called forth a new culture. By overturning a great and, as it seemed, a firmly-rooted power it has deeply touched the imagination of the liberated Russians, affected their mentality and activity, changed their mode of thought, and introduced unexpected differences into their lives. All these are very powerful factors in the conception and organisation of a new form of theatre and drama. Plays, producers, actors and methods have emerged which but for the Revolution would not have been. The proof of this is contained in the theories and practices described in the following chapters.

The first cause of the new theatre is, then, the Revolution operating upon a working-class population prepared to respond theatrically to its influences. The second cause is Recognition of the importance of the theatre. Recognition has come in two ways, from the workers and from the Government. To the workers the theatre appeared as an instrument of self-expression and self-explanation which they could use to construct a working-model of a form of society with a healthier, a more tolerable foundation than the old one, and freer from the danger of political and industrial tyrannies. The revolutionary moment called for vigorous, healthy self-assertion. It called, too, for the fullest expression of that unfolding under the touch of creative experience which is the very essence of drama, and



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without which no form of drama can exist for long. The workers who, with unerring instinct, recognised the true function of the theatre—to initiate human beings into eternal truth—took measures to capture the theatre and to apply it to its proper purpose.

The recognition of the theatre by the Soviet Government was somewhat different. To them it appeared a great source of danger if left in old reactionary hands, and a powerful instrument of expression of Soviet State aims if nationalised. Recognition of the theatre by the workers had its origin in the sudden awakening to the fact that they were no longer slaves or subject people, but comparatively free men and citizens, free to express their own initiative and genius. Recognition of the theatre by the Soviet Government and the leaders of the communist movement had, as much as the Soviets, its origin in the Marxian or communist economic hypothesis. The Government required as many instruments as they could get to secure the Revolution and to apply the principles for which it was fought, and to make known the industrial system which was to be their particular manner of social organisation. They saw in the theatre an almost unlimited means of capturing the imagination of the Russian workers, and of appealing to the communist in them in a form which they, with their deeply-rooted primitive peasant instincts, find resistless. They knew their mind could only be reached in one simple way—by a system of education quickened by the dramatic play-spirit. It was as though the Soviet Government saw the theatre as the nearest way out of a petrified world of education.

Hence, to these two causes must be added a third, Response. It is the enthusiastic, even joyful, response of the workers to the demands of their inner feeling for free dramatic expression.

Why should they so eagerly respond! It is not hard to understand if we consider the mentality and psychology of the Russian people. <sup>1</sup> "This people is, above all, restless, tending to mysticism, subject to sudden revulsions, to renunciations, to mass repentance, to expiatory movements, to self-abandonment." If this means anything it is that the Russians are

<sup>1</sup> "Economic Metaphysics," by Gabriel Hanotaux. "Manchester Guardian" Commercial Supplement. May 18, 1922.

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fundamentally fluid. When the Revolution overturned every old value and made the static social stratas fluid, it simply gave free expression to the fluidity of the Russian people. It melted the imperialised solid stratas and set them flowing into new moulds, recasting themselves, setting up new standards and exalting the proletariat where the bourgeoisie so long had been. The flow was a dramatic one. The call of the theatre was insistent. The response was inevitable. If there had been no theatre in existence this people would have made one. As it is they have made the existing one their own.

In short then, the new theatre was made possible by the Revolution producing the need and providing the opportunity. It was brought into existence by the people and Government seeing the need and taking measures to meet it.

## CHAPTER II

### *HISTORICAL LIMITATIONS*

**O**WING to its peculiar origin the new theatre has certain important historical limitations and an equally important historical significance. These deserve to be considered. The story of the new theatre is the story of its birth, growth and development under the watchful care of two guardians—the Russian workers and their Government. Both were convinced of the extreme importance of the child they fostered, so to speak, to the cause to which they were pledged. On no account must it be permitted to fall into reactionary hands, be permitted to do anything that should turn the dawning day into dismal night. All sorts of creatures were working stealthily to undo the fine work that had been done. All sorts of plays lurked somewhere in the shadows of theatre cupboards, ready to express the gruesome ideology of the bourgeoisie, a class which the Revolution had swept from the seats of the mighty, if not for ever at least till they had repented of their sins. Considerations of this kind, no doubt, bound the two to one purpose of making the theatre safe for communism and a place where the new industrial civilisation on modern lines could be expressed. It should shape what the Revolution had outlined, express the new social and industrial movement, whether in its destructive or constructive aspects, and exclude all that failed to champion and advance this movement. Both, in short, sought to maintain the highest standards and a purpose both professed supreme. The purpose was that of successfully rearing a theatre which was really a part of themselves—a part of their collective selves, and as such demanding to be rid of the individualistic past. But owing to considerations of another kind their methods differed. The people closed their

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stage to one thing, and the Government closed their stage to another thing.

The difference is hardly to be wondered at when the different origins—the self-expression of the workers and the State expression of the Government—as described in the preceding chapter, are taken into account. This means that two states of mind were at work sorting out suitable materials for the New House of Interpretation. On the one hand, there was that set up by the conscious memory and aspiration of the masses—here and throughout this book, considered as the working-class, that is, the working-class population which predominates in Russia to-day. On the other, there was the state produced by the political ambition of the Government. The conscious memory of the workers themselves did not go much beyond the Revolution. It was then the real struggle for a new direction to their existence began, and all the forces of this struggle came together for the first time, and the theatre sprang out of themselves as an expression of the struggle and of themselves. The aspiration was centred in the wonderful new world, in some ways, an imaginative one, opened to them by the Revolution and subsequent events. The effect of the Revolution was to translate them into an ideal world where their primitive instincts and emotions ran riot, and where apparently they could get nearer to the real things of the present and the future. The contemplation of this world caused the past to vanish from their sight. The theatre came to play a part of the greatest importance by providing a playground wherein they could construct this new and wonderful world, and, of course, their enthusiasm for the theatre knew no bounds.

The ambition of the Government was also largely set in the present and future. The Government represented a political party of advanced views (from a Russian standpoint), that sought to establish itself in Russia for the purpose, first of all, of communising that country and thereafter of communising the whole world. In pursuit of their ambition they nationalised the theatre, and encouraged the popular enthusiasm as a part of their own campaign of communisation. They wished to enlighten the workers as to the meaning, significance and necessity of communism. They wished to make the workers' new world a communistic world, and the theatre a place wherein the

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workers could enjoy themselves while constructing such a world.

In this way then much of the past and its inspiration was cut off from the work of the new theatre. All engaged in the theatre were actuated by a hatred towards that period of the past of which they were victims. They were urged by their own feelings to renounce everything belonging to men who they firmly believed had sought to deprive them of their will, intelligence and conscience, had done their best to take their very soul into custody. And they were told repeatedly by their leaders to rid themselves of the old individualistic ruling class and of everything that belonged to it, and to construct a new world of materials extracted entirely from themselves, but in a communist way. Thus they were led unconsciously to draw upon a remote past while believing that they were only drawing upon the present. In manner they went right back to the great historical forms of expression; in matter they took whatever the thought and action of up-to-date scientific industrialism had to offer. So they did not wipe the past out altogether.

To what did the workers close their stage? To what did the Government close their stage? The best way to find an answer is to consider the plays produced by each since 1918. If we watch the workers in their theatre we shall discover that their productions fall into five definite periods answering to those of their own theatrical advance. All these periods are dealt with in order in the chapter devoted to the Proletarian theatre.

Statistics have been published from time to time which throw a light upon the workers' preferences, and their attempts to shut out historical periods of the theatre which did not express the life they wished to live. Perhaps instinctively, at any rate fortunately, they recognised that these periods, particularly the latest, were periods of convention and development when the stage deserted its duty—the duty of expressing unfolding human life and communicating this, and substituted system for soul—artificial system of thought and observation, artificial system of interpretation, a vast mechanical system of representation, all of which has turned the theatre into a factory for the manufacture of a vicious drug capable of dehumanising the spectator, de-citizenising the citizen, in short, of promoting

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social slavery. By these means the theatre has become a powerful instrument for the subjection of men instead of one for their liberation.

Immediately after the Revolution there was very little change in the theatre. Apparently there were no plays to suit the sentiment of the moment. A definite change took place at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919. Statistics about this time reveal the workers selecting their own theatrical fare, under the watchful eye of the Government censorship. The selection is described by Matthias in his book on Russia,<sup>1</sup> and as it is made from authentic statistics, it may be given here. It seems that at all the theatres, including those controlled by workers, peasants and soldiers, Ostrovsky was most frequently played. Alexander Ostrovsky is a Russian classic unknown outside Russia. He is the founder of the Russian National theatre. He is sometimes spoken of as the Russian Schiller. Probably his great popularity with the Russian workers is due to the fact that he whips the very class that they are most opposed to. <sup>2</sup>"He depicts the life of the merchant class, the petty landowner and bourgeoisie and lower bureaucracy. He always presents a strange life unacceptable to Western nations. His dramas represent the truest and most comprehensive mirror of Russian middle-class life of the sixties and seventies of the last century."

With this exception middle-class plays and middle-class authors were strictly banned. The gap thus produced was filled in by the dramatisation by the workers of many novels containing materials suited to their purpose. In fact they dramatised everything they could lay hands on. Thus they ingeniously rewrote novels by Merimee, Maupassant, Claudel, Gorki and Tchekov. In the provinces the dramatised novels of Tchekov ran a close second to the plays of Ostrovsky. There was also a big demand for Tchekov's little farces. The workers and peasants would have nothing to do with Tchekov's big plays.

A similar selection was noticeable in the big towns. Communist subjects were handled as far as possible, and with these went a mixture of plays by Ostrovsky, Gogol, the "little" Tchekov,

<sup>1</sup> Genie und Wahnsinn in Russland, von Leo Matthias.

<sup>2</sup> C. Nabokoff in "The Contemporary," May, 1927.

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Count Alexis Tolstoi, and one or two other modern "classics." It is worthy of note that the peasants played their own pieces. All these pieces were very intricate, full of significance and deep religious feeling. Mostly moral questions were handled. "Sin and Redemption" is the title of one play. The place of action was nearly always the land. The peasant plays were essentially different from those of the workers, being deeply tinged with religious mysticism, whereas the workers' plays were attacks on the former ruling class, and revolutionary propaganda, and a flight from individualistic literary influences. From 1919 onward there was a gradual return to the spirit that actuated the beginning of the Russian theatre two hundred and fifty years ago—a spirit manifested in buffoonery, caricature and laughter. A study of the plays produced during this period is a study of early Greek, Elizabethan, and *Commedia dell'arte* matter and manner, of the heroic, patriotic and satiric, of spontaneity, improvisation and co-operation. Such plays produce a vision of an amazing processional of workers at play-acting who are seen passing from the defence of Russia from Olympian heights to laughter and dancing in the Elysian Fields of their newly-found industrial self-ownership. Throughout they have no truck whatever with their late owners.

The Government's policy of a closed stage also aimed to exclude individualistic and non-communistic matter. But it was less personal than the workers' policy. The workers' attitude to the stage was mainly determined by the discovery of themselves and the possibility of a new modern world of their own. Apparently they found in themselves an inexhaustible mine of rich material for building this world, and were content to set to work to dig things out of themselves. They ignored or were unaware of the fact that there was a good deal in the classics, emotionally if not intellectually, to help them to realise themselves. Some of the leaders of the Soviet Government understood this. Lunacharsky, the Minister of Popular Education, was one, for instance. These saw that the workers were in open rebellion against not only modern plays exhibiting the ideology of the bourgeoisie, but against old and new plays some of which contained elements of communism that were obscured by individualistic prejudice, and some that were old-fashioned in sentiment and technique, but contained an abundance of

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primitive emotion capable of moving and, in a way, uplifting a primitive audience possessing strong musical and dramatic instincts. They understood, in fact, the importance of putting the people in the humour to dance and sing and act, and the value of comparatively naïve masterpieces, plays and operas, in producing the humour. An old opera composed of folk-songs and dances, with its humour and colour, was just the right thing for the people, while an extreme example of Stravinsky's technique was not. But, for the most part, they refused to admit modern plays which dealt with subjects according to an attitude of mind which they wished to destroy. The emancipation of the Russian working-class was their first object.

Coming to statistics, we find that the Soviet Government, at first, did not interfere with the Russian theatre. They were far too busy securing the Revolution, overcoming resistance at the frontier, removing the evils of civil war and the blockade, and reorganising national economy. But they fully recognised both the danger and the possibility of it. Indeed, to their mind there was no greater opposition to the new State than the theatre with its bourgeois ideology. At one time they found, for instance, Stanislavsky producing "Balldyna," a poem by Slovacki, a Pole, written at the beginning of the nineteenth century, upholding three catholic axioms opposed to communist moral principles. Besides this they recognised the importance of the theatre as an instrument of education and propaganda

As soon as more pressing political and economic matters admitted, the Government turned their attention directly to the theatres, all of which had been nationalised, that is, transferred from private to State ownership, and brought into a single scheme shortly after the Revolution. <sup>1</sup>A reliable writer tells us that the first sign of Government interference appeared in the establishment of a department of Education by means of theatrical production. This was placed under the direction of Comrade Kel, whose duties, according to his own conception, consisted in "ideology and organisation." From results it would appear that these terms meant a search for and examination of the best proletarian ideas and

<sup>1</sup> "Theatre et Communisme en Russie des Soviets." Andre Julien. "Les Ecrits Nouveaux." Nov. 1921.



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trends in the theatre emerging from the Revolution, and their widest dissemination. Such ideas and trends Kel and his colleagues believed should come from the proletariat themselves. In pursuit of this belief they were disposed to do away with everything belonging to the capitalist ideology, and to promote only proletarian ideology. They decided to tap new sources of theatrical activity, and to draw from the workers (or proletariat, as they called them) and peasants, authors, directors, producers, decorators, in fact, all the objects and agents of theatrical interpretation and representation. By this means the Russian theatre would be rid of a gang of producers, authors and actors to whom the capitalist ideology had given birth, and from whom nothing new or true could be expected.

In order to set the new current flowing, the immediate programme consisted in closely uniting the working-class and the theatre by establishing as many theatres all over Russia as possible. Available figures shew the success of the programme. In 1914 there existed in Russia 210 theatres—70 good, and 140 inferior ones. After the Revolution the communists rigorously suppressed the latter, which shows conclusively that they were seeking quality as well as quantity. In all the cities and towns they opened big theatres, and in the big and small villages little theatres. In this, no doubt, they were actively assisted by the working-class and peasant population, whose thirst for the theatre was and remains unquenchable. At one period since the Revolution there were more theatres in one of the Volga districts than in the whole of France. In 1920 there existed 2,197 subsidised theatres, 268 theatres in popular institutions, and 3,452 active theatrical organisations in the villages. A total of nearly 6,000 stages instead of 210.

The Government Commission controlling the subsidised theatres exercised a strict censorship, in accordance with Kel's proletarian ideology and organisation. They absolutely forbade the production of anything not approved by themselves. The result was that a whole period of theatrical history, that of the second half of the nineteenth century, was completely cut. It was the Free Theatre period, which began in Germany in the eighties of the last century, when a new spirit possessed the German form of drama, mainly due to the initiative of Ibsen, and thereafter spread to different

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parts of Europe, including Russia, where it found expression through Tolstoy, Gorky, Dostoievsky and others. It is worthy of note that everywhere in the countries in which this new spirit appeared, the strongest efforts were made to keep it off the stage as being too dangerous for the general public. But the opposition was partly overcome by the establishment of Free theatres. In Germany, the *Freie Buhne*, under Otto Brahm; in France, the *Theatre de l'Oeuvre*, under Lugné Poë; in England, the *Independent Theatre*, under J. T. Grein, and so on. The reason for official interference is not hard to understand. <sup>1</sup>" With the rise of the new drama and its intense interest in the miseries and hardships of the lower classes, these classes began to grow more conscious of themselves, to demand a greater share of life, and to organise for political action." In other words, the aim of the new insurgent dramatists was to present to the people a vivid vision of their struggle with capitalistic and other forces, and so to prepare them for social revolution. Naturally the official class did not want this sort of self-consciousness.

In view of the strong social revolutionary spirit of the Free theatre plays it seems strange that the Productions Committee banned them. The reason is that they are not distinctly human in the sense that the representatives of Soviet Russia understand the term. They are anarcho-individualistic products, and as such contain dangerous isolating elements. The Russian stage, as actuated by the communists, seeks to become distinctly human by banishing those barriers set up between the stage and auditorium, between the author and spectator, by an intensely egoistic period of dramatic theory and practice from the eighteen-sixties to 1917. It was a period marked by theatrical reforms which, in spite of their popular interest, were designed to make the theatre the pulpit of the few and the laboratory of eviscerated æsthetic cliques, and not the forum and the playground of the many. This period, for instance, gave the theatre three tendencies—actualistic, symbolical and impressionistic, each of which took the spectator further and further from that theatricality which is the true business of the theatre as a theatre. The arch-egoists of the Free theatre took the stage and told the people to demand a greater share of life

<sup>1</sup>" Germany in Travail." Otto Manthey-Zorn.

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as they, the egoists, conceived it. They neglected to tell the people to take the stage and to demand a greater share of life as they, the people, conceived it. Herein then was the main objection of the communists to the Free theatre plays. They were the expression of anarcho-individualism, not of anarcho-collectivism. The central figure, or protagonist, in each was a personality representing a personality, not the mass forming a personality.

The Commission, while they were waiting for novelties from the proletariat, were compelled to search in theatrical cupboards for plays to keep the theatres going. Consequently there was a return to classical comedies. They sanctioned the production of plays by Shakespeare, Moliere, Goldoni, even Lope de Vega. Shakespeare's plays were frequently performed. His popularity was so great that in Moscow on one day in 1919 his plays were being performed at two theatres. Schiller's "Robbers" was played even more frequently. Don Carlos was given less frequently. Goethe did not have a single representation. In regard to modern authors the selection was similar to that of the workers already mentioned. A guide to the prevailing tendency is found in the performance of the Grand Duke Constantine Romanov's "King of Judæa" at the State theatre in Moscow. The performance of this piece was forbidden by the Imperial Government. <sup>1</sup> "Also a sort of old morality play, equally mystical and deeply religious, was given in a small theatre in Moscow, perhaps three times a fortnight during the winter of 1920-1921." This is mentioned in an official statement as a proof that the State theatres had not undergone much change. The truth is, however, that the spirit of the Government Commission was a communist one. If a non-communistic interest was noticeable here and there, such as the circus pantomime which frequently was concerned with Biblical legends, it was simply a concession to the groundlings. The programme of the State or subsidised theatres contained many authors unknown to Western Europe and America, the object being clearly to entertain only audiences of Russian nationality. It contained few revolutionary plays, probably because there were but few existing ones. "Danton," by Romain Rolland, "Morgenrot," by Verhaeren, "Rache," by

<sup>1</sup> Russian Information and Review.

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Claudel, "The Robbers," by Schiller, "Cain," by Byron, and some pieces by Russian authors were the most frequently played. Revolutionary plays increased in number as time went on, and as other revolutions and political changes took place and provided authors and materials. The German Revolution in 1919, for instance, gave a decided impulse to political and social revolutionary thought and action in the German theatre. Several of the plays which it either called forth or released for performance subsequently appeared in the new Russian theatre. Toller's plays, for instance, found a welcome in Russia.

The foregoing particular control of theatrical activity ceased in 1921, when a new inclusive Commission was established. According to the writer already mentioned, M. Andre Julien, it was composed of representative theatre men instead of political propagandists. They were Stanislavsky, Meierhold, Kel, Sanine and Vahtangov. The first two are well-known to the students of the theatre everywhere. Kel, Vahtangov and Sanine, formerly of the Imperial Theatre, Moscow, are all three well versed in the work and requirements of the theatre. Sanine is an expert in the handling of stage crowds. The chief effect of this new Commission was to split the theatre into three divisions with one aim. There was a consequent reappearance of certain plays which had been put on the index. This much was to be expected with Stanislavsky on the Commission. It was demanded not only by his individualistic taste, culture and somewhat old-fashioned art propensities, but by the repertory with which he had built up the fame of the Moscow Art theatre. He had spent a lifetime in forming this repertory. No one had produced plays by Tchekov, Ibsen, Gorky and other members of the old intelligentsia in a comparable manner. He had literally stocked his theatre with highly-finished productions of truly excellent plays without consideration for their political meaning, if such they had. To him they appeared only as a medium for the exercise of his exceptional abilities as director, producer and actor. When the Revolution came they were all the plays he had. They were essential to his theatre, actually a part of it. He had no time or means for new productions. Before the war it sometimes took him

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two years to produce a play. Every detail had to be true to life, every player had to study to lose himself in his true-to-life part. All this demanded time and leisure which were not forthcoming during the Revolution and the period of intense unrest which followed. One can imagine Stanislavsky waiting throughout this period for the opportunity to exhibit little masterpieces which he had fashioned for his own use, as it were, regardless of the demands of that wider and perhaps higher national life which it was the purpose of the new State theatrical directors to serve. With the new Commission came an opportunity, but not a full one. If he wished to revive a masterpiece he could not hope to do so precisely in the old way, that is, in a way that would be wholly antipathetic to the new spirit of the Russian theatre. For Meierhold was on the Commission. Meierhold was not only one of the most daring and original directors the Russian theatre has ever seen, but he was a decided communist. He had fought not only for upward of twenty years for theatrical reform, but as a red soldier for working-class liberation, and had brought his vision of class war and world struggle for the workers' emancipation into the theatre.

The difference of opinion and idea between the individualist member of the Commission for whom the theatre had no value beyond the individuality of its director, and the communist members for whom the theatre had an extreme value as an organic part of social and national life, that is, the individuality of the people, was bound to produce a compromise. Although the Commission were appointed with a view of not enforcing the strict censorship of their predecessor, they were not, for the above reasons, likely to abandon censorship altogether. Strictly speaking, they were not propagandists, but they included one, at least, who had fought for the Revolution and was determined that the theatre should gather some of its fruits.

So if we examine the programme of the theatre from 1921 onward we shall find that the ban was taken off certain plays. And if anyone happen to attend the performance of one of these plays probably he will find that it has changed its old environment for a revolutionary one. The Commission could not always make propaganda of a play, but they could some-

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times make propaganda of its background. For this reason it is not possible to form an opinion of the change in the new Russian theatre since 1921 by an examination of the theatre programme alone. The titles of plays mean very little. Expression, revolutionary, political and other, is obtained by means of representation and interpretation, according to the new theories and practice of acting and staging plays. Men of the theatre fully understand the value of acting and staging in bringing out or giving a meaning to plays. Indeed, it might be said, no play is good or bad, but acting and staging make it so. Here is a very good illustration of the method of adaptation.

<sup>1</sup> "Meierhold himself produced 'Dawn,' a play that is a curious blend of mysticism and revolutionary spirit; and he set about the task of production in a decidedly unconventional manner. He cut out long passages, added one or two new scenes and remodelled several characters. The play that remained was certainly not Verhaeren's—Meierhold never claimed that it was. But it was just as certainly something of considerable value for a revolutionary period at least." And here is support for the opinion that acting has its effect.  
<sup>2</sup> "The strolling players in 'Hamlet,' as a Russian critic said, were very probably bad players. Their performance, on the evidence before us, seems a little crude. But it had, or is stated to have had, a certain rather marked effect upon the audience."

Besides the use of this subtle means of emphasising the propaganda meaning of plays, much was still done to destroy the effects of a period of dramatic literature during which everything was written for the intelligentsia and bourgeoisie and nothing for the working-class. As we shall see presently, gradually mimicking and acrobatics took the place of dialogue, and the movements of the circus and the gymnasias were introduced to take the place which words had occupied as interpreters of thought and action. As by the first Commission, individualistic tendencies in playwrighting which had served to bolster up a worthless form of bourgeois idealism were banned. These could not be permitted to remain at a period when everything was to be based on the idealism of the working-class. And authors of the peculiar anarcho-individualistic attitude of

<sup>1</sup> "Russian Information and Review."

<sup>2</sup> "Russian Information and Review."

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Kuprin, Artzibashev and Andreiev, who represented the revolutionary intellectuals and not the revolutionary proletariat, must be banished from the stage. This meant that a very large number of pre-revolution authors, both home and foreign, continued on the index. For, while these authors undoubtedly exploited a wide range of ideas and ideals of their time, their ideas and ideals were expressed in an individualistic and capitalistic way that did not admit of adaptation, and that was calculated to do utmost harm to the revolutionary theatre. So they must give place to authors with the real revolutionary fire, openly expressed or implied by their plays.

The programme of this period then contained such extremes as Maiakovsky's "Mysteria Bouffes," with its vision of class struggle and its end in a Communist paradise, and Tchekov's big plays, and certain plays by Shakespeare which had been on the shelf since 1917. The kind of exhibitions given at the big State theatres early in 1922 may be stated in the words of an English Labour representative who visited Russia at this time. <sup>1</sup> "In all the large towns opera is very much the vogue. In Petrograd and Moscow 'Boris Godunov,' 'Prince Igor,' 'Carmen,' 'Faust,' 'La Traviata,' 'The Barber of Seville,' 'The Daughter of Madam Angot,' 'The Queen of Spades,' and 'Eugene Onegin,' were amongst those I had the pleasure of hearing and seeing. The scenery has much more artistic finish and, at the same time, is much more natural than the scenery of our London theatres." The latter observation bears out what has been said with regard to the special attention paid to the staging and scenery. On reference to the Moscow Art theatre programme printed elsewhere, it will be seen that Lecoq's revolutionary light opera, "Madame Angot," has been frequently played of late at this theatre. It is one of the concessions made by Stanislavsky to the communist attitude of the new Commission. In the opinion of the just-quoted observer, "the real Russian ballet is in Russia." What this means is not clear. The famous Imperial school of dancing has been maintained ever since the Revolution, and its principles are applied to the ballets. The ballets, like the above-mentioned operas, are chosen for their value in appealing to primitive emotions. They exhibit none of the intellectual

<sup>1</sup> "The Russian Stage" Tom Quelch, "The Actor," January, 1922.

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and physical gymnastics which characterised the Russian ballets performed by the Diaghelev touring company and produced by Massine. Still the dancers are rigidly trained.

As a direct result of the foregoing tendencies four historical effects may be noted. They are: (1) In the new theatre little or no history in dramatic form is exhibited; (2) a new drama in historical form is appearing; (3) acting takes partly a traditional and partly an untraditional revolutionary form; (4) scenery is revolutionary and constructive in order to eliminate traditional factors and to meet the demand for concentration. It reveals the influences of the machine, the circus, and cinema.

Let us consider these effects in detail. There is little or no history in dramatic form. Representation is to be national, realistic and communistic in character. It is to promote revolutionary propaganda, to afford instruction in the communistic interpretation of society and inspiration in the construction of a new Russia. Thus it becomes a vital force in the actual life of the nation. Accordingly the theatre must turn to historical forms of drama only for whatever illustrates the new principles of life; liberates the workers from the power of the capitalists and influence of the bourgeoisie, while casting utmost contempt and ridicule on the latter; and generally helps the destructive and constructive effects of the Revolution. This assumes the existence of a communist form of historical drama or communist history in dramatic form. But such a form of drama hardly exists. Hitherto little or nothing has been done to employ a revolutionary materialistic interpretation of history for dramatic purposes, and to draw forth and exhibit the Marxian idea which lies slumbering in historical facts. Searching for suitable plays through periods of dramatic literature during which everything was written by the intelligentsia for their own class and for the wealthy bourgeoisie, and nothing for the masses, is like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack.

The result of the search has, however, resulted in the discovery of works containing elements favourable to communism, with the consequent adaptation of the same. Hence the exhibition of historical plays in revolutionary backgrounds calculated to emphasise their communist material—tyrannical,



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mad, and spendthrift rulers, criminal personalities, immoral and self-centred bourgeois society, that is, individualistic human forces of which the masses have been the victims. The object of exhibiting these plays is: (1) To destroy the personality created by the anarcho-individualist writer; (2) to destroy the old ruling class; (3) to destroy the bourgeoisie; (4) to construct a new collective personality by making the masses take the centre of the stage; (5) new drama in historical form, *i.e.*, contemporary history. History is to be presented not as an isolated idea providing a text to be preached from the stage-pulpit whenever necessary, such as patriotism contained in great patriotic plays, but as a pageant of events illustrating history in the making. Immediate revolutionary and political events provide the material for catching the popular imagination and drawing the masses forth on the streets in demonstrations, protests, parades, festivals, etc., or concentrating vast numbers of them in the performance of open-air political mysteries and other mass plays. Life-centred philosophy, morals and art provide the material for attracting the masses to the theatre, where they may share in the pageantry of dramatic spectacles designed to tell them that they are no longer at the mere mercy of individualistic forces, nor the victims of individualistic struggle, but are free to follow their own great powers and possibilities.

Hence the need of new writers capable of handling romantic heroism and satiric spectacles of the time. Such spectacles must be designed to turn the whole theatre into a stage, and to place the stage in the midst of the public in such a way as to persuade them to take part in the performance.

Hence the appearance of writers to take up the challenge of the present and to ignore the immediate past. Writers who are concerned with the main achievements of the past four years, the advance of industrial science, and its application to the building up of the new Russia, and the representation of this contemporary history on the stage.

Hence, too, the tendency in acting to pay no attention to immediate and near classical utterances, but to transfer itself from the playhouse to the factory and circus, hoping to get the fullest power of interpretation from these sources.

Finally comes the tendency in stage-craft to leave immediate

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and near historical paths. Scenery turns to the factory and circus to the machine-like structure and the arena for direction. In doing so it is clearly seeking to break away from photographic and pictorial forms and to assume something living and essential in their place.

What is the historical significance of all this? Actually its immediate meaning is the substitution of one form of isolation for another. The new Theatre is in the hands of a nation of workers who have no enthusiasm for the remembered past, which they believe has no inspiration for the present or future. They are primitives who have not been separated by intellect from the springs of human action, and who naturally and unconsciously draw upon some of the very best and most convincing historical sources of dramatic expression. They are Patriots and New Nationalists who hope to create a new Russia which shall arise from the ashes of the old one, and be greater than Russia ever has been. They stand for modern universal industrialism, and their new world is to be fashioned with its latest and most powerful instruments, machines and tools. They are mainly guided by a body of communistic rulers who have no enthusiasm for the nation's past, which they also believe has no inspiration for the present. But they have a burning enthusiasm for the nation's present, and an overwhelming belief that the nation has a mighty future before it. And they have the power to communicate this enthusiasm and belief to the workers in such a way as to convince them that they must live in the present and the future.

So comes the general tendency of the new Russian theatre to drop one form of isolation for another, to turn from the post-Revolution aristocratic isolation to a neo-medixæval and more generally democratic and human one. As we shall see presently a rather narrow and intolerant individualism is replaced by a broader and tolerant co-operation and co-ordination. This admits the dramatisation of the whole of the present existence within the limitation set up by isolating politics and economics. The modern theatrical paradise thus opened is not exactly one for dilettanti. It calls for an intimate knowledge of and an essential mastery over its somewhat complex subject-matter. At the same time the trend has excluded the main currents of theatrical thought and action

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for close upon a century. All the currents which flowed from anarcho-individualistic and bourgeois sources into plays and operas have been as completely cut off as though they never existed. Thus, as we have seen, a whole period of theatrical history, that of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century, has disappeared from the Russian theatre. Technically the present theatre is concerned with theatricality, and it does not attempt to continue or develop from the theatre of yesterday which was shaped in turn by the plays by Rôbertson, by Ibsen and the Free theatre writers, by Maeterlinck, and by the school of continental writers, all confessing and professing the Impressionist and Expressionist creeds. Its only approach to yesterday is a narrow bridge of Italian Futurism, across which come ideas of machine action, improvisation and exercise of the creative imagination. With this exception it goes right back to Greek unity of stage and auditorium, to mediæval nature plays and performances under the open sky, to Elizabethan comedy spirit, to the Italian *Commedia dell'arte* system of acting. But these historical excursions are, as already pointed out, made unconsciously by the workers themselves. They reveal a new race of men, as we might call the Russian workers, setting out in search of new theatrical matter and manner. They take new paths, as they believe, but they do not succeed in getting away from the old powers of art and action residing within themselves. These are eternal powers which they have inherited and which produced the very impressions and expressions which they themselves are producing. The present historical tendency in the Russian theatre is towards unity. The new men of the theatre seeks to bridge that wide gap caused by the movement in the general theatre aiming to draw the player and spectator widely apart instead of drawing them close together. They seek intimacy.

## CHAPTER III

### *STATE CONCEPTION AND ORGANISATION*

LOOKING in the foregoing chapters at the causes, immediate and near, of the new theatre as well as at the difference of the two bodies, Government and workers engaged in constructing it, a difference of conception and organisation is to be expected. Such a difference does exist, so slight, it is true, as to admit of the conception and organisation being spoken of as a two-fold one, that of the Government and that of the workers. It is the difference between self-expression and State-expression. Beyond this there is the different conceptions and organisations of theatres associated, immediately or remotely, with the advanced aims of the new theatre. These will be considered in turn.

First, as to the Government conception and organisation of this theatre.

The real need of such a conception and organisation lay in the necessity of securing the best results of the Revolution. The Revolution placed the Government of Russia in the hands of resolute communists. Their ambition to make Russia a communist country made necessary the education of the Russian people in the theories and practice of communism, and the establishment of institutions and the appointment of new Government officials for the purpose. This led to the appointment of a Minister of Popular Education with wide powers of control and co-ordination. In A. Lunacharsky the Department of Education fortunately found a minister fitted, by an unusual combination of political, dramatic and art interests to occupy this important post and to supervise its functions, foremost among them being that of drawing up and carrying out a comprehensive programme of popular education

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suited not only to recognised centres of teaching, universities and schools, but to centres of dramatic and art expression, exhibitions, theatres, studios, etc.

By this appointment the meaning and intent of the conception and organisation of the new theatre are made clear. With the arrival of Lunacharsky a practical policy of State education to be applied to the theatre was quickly crystallised for the Government, and the Government were committed to the support of that policy. It was perhaps the first distinct definition of the position of the Russian Government relative to theatrical and art exhibitions. For the first time in the history of Russia the theatre was made an essential part of a new administrative synthetic organisation. Instead of being left to wander along a reactionary path of its own as in England and America, where the path happens to be a commercial one as literally paved with gold as hell is said to be with good intentions, the danger of this isolation was recognised, and the theatre was drawn first of all into the general body of Government institutions and thus became one of the engines, so to speak, of the body. Thereafter it was made to serve a particular purpose of its own. It was treated as a separate body, just as a gland of the human body might be, and provided with engines of its own. In this way it fell into definite parts, each having a function of its own, yet all serving the general educational-propaganda purpose.

The aim then was to form a definite relation between the State and theatre, so as to make the latter function as a State educational department. This was in accordance with the general aim of the Soviet Government to systematise every and all State functions in such a way that they became part and parcel of one great central organisation, with live wires, so to speak, stretching throughout and uniting all parts of Russia. It was the industrial system of organisation designed to fulfil one predominating purpose, and one only. It existed to centralise and disseminate communism. Its methods were education, propaganda and agitation.

As might be expected, a new conception arose, according to which a theatre was to be established from which everybody and everything except the masses and their dramatic experiences were to be excluded. This theatre was to be organised to form a great popular university and forum for the expressions of the

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new communism. In short, it was to be an institution that had sprung spontaneously from the workers or proletariat as they were called, as an expression of themselves plus an expression of the communists.

The Minister of Education, who was directly responsible for fostering this conception, and represents both the cause of the workers and the Government, has put forth repeated arguments in support of the Government policy, and has made us acquainted through <sup>1</sup>the "Manchester Guardian Reconstruction Supplement" with some of the arguments and the reasons for supporting them. In an article on "Culture in the Soviet Republic," he remarks: "Every popular revolution has been confronted with the problem of national education. Washington's first successors in the Presidency of the United States pointed out that democracy without the fundamental education of the masses of the population is but an empty sound. The French Revolution, strangled by a financial crisis, was able to carry out none of its great educational plans. (Condorcet, Lepelletier have remained to this day pillars of fire for educationists, they had a very strong influence on Pestalozzi and Froebel, and through these are still influencing the highest ideals of educationists.) Russia in 1917, in the hour of the Revolution, found herself in no better way situated than were these other countries in the period of their democratic transmutation.

"The Communist party, which led the Revolution, had at once to face the problem of the cultural development of the masses. It is well known that Russia was one of the most backward countries in Europe as regards illiteracy. Through the medium of the People's Commissar of Education, the Soviet Government from the outset declared war on ignorance, and in many cases achieved remarkable success. It should be remembered, however, that even the class which guided the revolutionary movement—*i.e.*, the proletariat—counted many illiterates in its ranks, and still more numerous under-educated men, who were guided in their politics by their proletarian instinct rather than by pure reasoning, while no support was offered to Soviet Russia by the intellectuals." He goes on to show that the Soviet Government were left practically alone "to face the

<sup>1</sup> "Manchester Guardian" Commercial Supplement. July 6, 1922.

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urgent task of assisting the people in their combat with ignorance." Besides this the educational resources bequeathed, so to speak, by the Tsarist regime were inadequate. But against this he sets the fact that the Communist party had rich cultural resources of their own. "It had theories of its own, its own outlook on the world, its own methods in scientific Socialism." Still the Marxian theory demanded systematic development. Hence, "many a new task presented itself to the Soviet authorities in their cultural-educational endeavours." This leads to a consideration of the "unified educational system" and the attempt to carry it out. Included in the system is "theatrical propaganda which has been set on foot to exploit in the spirit of the Revolution the powerful influence of art and drama on the human soul." And, of course, academic theatres are being subsidised and are working uninterruptedly. Among these, we are told, are the Moscow Art theatre and the Kamerny theatre, both of which are doing work of value to the "Pan-Russian Theatre."

So the new theatre, as conceived by the Soviet Government, is an institution organised along far-reaching communistic lines, mainly by State officials who are not only extremely radical but up-to-date educationists.

Here is a summary of Lunacharsky's interpretation of and views on the conception and organisation, together with those of the Commissions responsible to him:

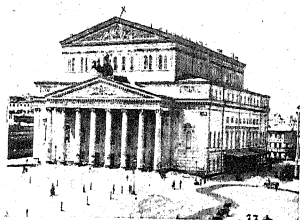
1. The formulation of great educational plans to assist the change from an Imperial to a communistic State.
2. The Organisation of Russia to exclude all non-communistic elements, *i.e.*, the old intelligentsia, bourgeoisie, etc.
3. The fundamental education of the masses, *i.e.*, the new population, in communism. To accept and understand everything of a communistic nature and to reject everything else.
4. War to be declared on ignorance and class.
5. The theatre to be made an organic part of the body of the State, one of its engines of war, and at the same time an instrument of enlightenment and recreation.

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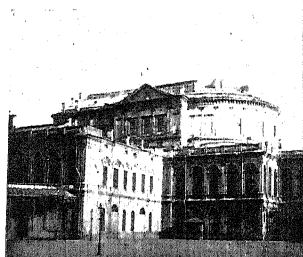
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6. The function of the theatre, to construct the communist world.
7. The communist Party are provided with excellent materials for building this world. They have theories, phraseology and methods in scientific Socialism of their own. In short, they have a Utopian world of their own to put upon the stage. This is a Marxian world modified by the psychology of the workers.
8. The powerful exfluence of art to be exploited in the spirit of the Revolution through theatrical propaganda.
9. Establishment of inclusive organisations within the Department of Theatre Education. The first Commission since the Revolution was composed of propagandists. It took over the control of theatrical activity. It enforced a strict censorship forbidding the staging of any production not chosen by itself. This so seriously limited initiative that the Commission was suppressed in 1921. A new Commission was appointed. It was composed of four men of the theatre, representing its three divisions—Left, Centre and Right.
10. The programme of this Commission is to bring the workers and the theatre together. To select existing plays according to these three divisions, but always preserving for the people the best of dramatic exhibitions, of course not antipathetic to the communistic spirit of the new theatre. [The species of plays selected have been shown in the preceding chapter, and will be dealt with further in succeeding chapters.]
11. To search for new communistic authors and encourage them.
12. To search for new trends in the theatre and disseminate them.
13. To extend the activities of the theatre to the remotest villages by means of tours and local productions in which the four Commissioners personally take part.
14. Special attention to be paid to the process of mixing

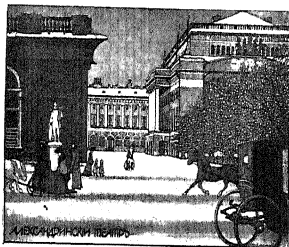




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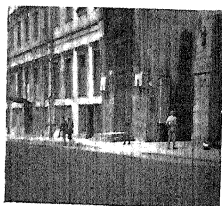
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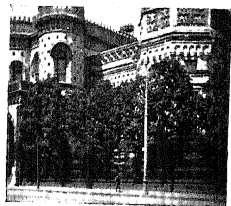
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Three types of theatre affected by the Revolution, which brought the theatres into three classes directed either by the workers, the Government or the old intellectuals. *Centre*—1. The Big Theatre, Moscow. 2. The Marinsky Theatre, Petrograd. 3. Alexandrinsky Theatre, Petrograd. 4. The old Jewish Theatre (Gabima). *Right*—5. Korsch Theatre. 6. Façade of the Moscow Art Theatre undergoing repair in 1923. *Left*—7. The Proletcult Theatre, formerly a millionaire's palace.



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the people in theatrical creations, by the organisation of pageants, mass performances, street shows, and other means.

15. The theatre to be used when necessary for the purpose of addressing the workers.

The method of constructing the cultural-educational theatre according to these ideas and principles, and the work undertaken by it will be found described in the chapter on Lunacharsky's Theatre

## CHAPTER IV

### *THE THREE GROUPS AND A NEW THREEFOLD CLASSIFICATION OF THEATRICAL ACTIVITIES*

OF the many important facts that stand out in connection with the present-day Russian theatre, three demand to be stated at this point. The first is that the Revolution, acting through the Government and the workers, has called into existence a multitude of big and small theatres. The Russian Government, as we have seen, have a great belief in the value of education, through the theatre, converting the new population into Marxian communists. Accordingly they have done all in their power to increase the number of theatres. The workers on their part have done a great deal to establish theatres in the belief that they are necessary to express their new life. The result is that to-day Russia is spotted with playhouses of one sort and another. At one time they were more numerous. But now, owing to the very grave economic situation by which many theatres have been deprived of Government support, several have closed temporarily. Still, the number of open theatres is very imposing.

The second fact is that behind this great number of theatres is the communistic spirit of the men who promoted the Revolution, and who practically influence the advance of the vast organisation. Such is the effect of the Revolution and the isolation which Russia has endured since that event, that it can be truly said that no theatrical performance is entirely free from communistic influence. In view of this fact, theatrical performances in Russia may be said to fall outside the definition of theatrical performances in Western Europe and America. For the most part they are so unusual that they must be seen

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to be understood. Their interpretation cannot be gathered from play-bill titles.

The third fact is that the advance is being made along three fronts, to use a military term, according to the three divisions set up by vesting the control of theatrical activity in a Commission composed of men who have different theories of the theatre.

In Russia theatrical circles are disposed to discuss these divisions in political terms of Left, Centre and Right. In doing so they merely follow a habit common to the world just now, wherein we see politicians abroad with the deliberate intention of stirring people to a political faith by dosing them with political jargon. Russia is badly bitten by politics. If Russian people do not live by politics alone, they live mainly on its terms. So come the Left, Centre and Right theatres.

All the theatres in Soviet Russia may be classified under these three divisions as follows:

*Left.*—Revolutionary, Proletcult, Political Satire theatres, and Club theatres of workers, peasants and students. The theatres of improvisation. Open-air, mass and street theatres, etc., etc.

*Centre.*—State theatres, Moscow and Petrograd; Children's theatres. Progressive theatres receiving State aid. The Centre Kamerny theatre. The old and new Jewish theatres, etc., etc.

*Right.*—The old bourgeois theatres, Moscow Art theatre, some Studio theatres, etc. The new bourgeois theatres—little theatres, cafés chantants, etc., all catering for that middle class which the new Economic Policy has revived.

For one or two reasons this division cannot be final. A number of theatres are used by the young insurgents for the dissemination of the latest radical doctrines. Again, there is a fight for the theatres going on between the different theatrical groups. The Left Group speak of certain productions by the Moscow Art theatre Studios as "Left" productions. This

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means that the Studios giving these productions have passed into the Left fold, as it were, for the time being.

A number of small theatrical organisations in the first group are outside the State organisation. And as they maintain the communistic attitude, the Government does not interfere with them. Elsewhere they are dealt with in their order.



C. S. STANISLAVSKY,

The third predominating personality in the new theatre.  
Co-director of the Moscow Art theatre.

## CHAPTER V

### *THE THREE REPRESENTATIVE PERSONALITIES*

THE three groups produced, as described in the preceding chapter, are, broadly speaking, represented by three dominating personalities—Left, Meierhold; Centre, Lunacharsky; Right, Stanislavsky, who are mainly responsible for their policies, organisations and work. This means that each group is largely actuated by the ideals and ideas of each man. The Left, by Meierhold's mixture of theatrical and communist ideas of a new form of theatre, new interpretation and representation. The Centre, by Lunacharsky's State cultural-educational conception and organisation. The Right,

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by Stanislavsky's pre-war ideas and his loyalty to old Conservative interests.

The temperament, training and physique of the three men and the influence of the Revolution upon them tell the whole story of the New Russian theatre. Indeed, if the present state of mind of the Russian workers produced by the Revolution and events after, can be read in their attitude towards the new theatre which has arisen, the state of mind of the theatre, so to speak, can be read in the mental and physical make-up of the three representative men who are directing its main activities. What does each contribute? Two of them are Men of the Theatre. The third is a Man of the People. The first may be said to be concerned with Manner. They seek, and have long done so, a form that shall contain the drama in such a way as to give it utmost effectiveness, each working from his own point of view towards that end. The Man of the People is more concerned with Matter. To him the expression of the ideology of the workers, the new population, is the thing of most account. So the three are really complementary to each other. Between them they provide the instrument of expression and the thing to be expressed. They form, as it were, the theatrical Trinity of the Revolution. By their aid the theatre may be said to be a consequence of the laws of the Revolution operating upon the people. This is a most important thing. Probably it has never happened before in the world's history so completely and so convincingly.

Meierhold is the most daring, influential and original of Russian theatrical directors. He is a mystical anarchist, just as Lunacharsky is a cultural revolutionist, and Stanislavsky is an emotional insurrectionist. When I met him again, for the first time after the Revolution, I could not help renewing my former impression of him. The innate character of the man was written all over him and his surroundings. Perhaps it was more marked than formerly. For the Revolution had touched him very deeply indeed, and had set his individuality expanding in a direction which was most congenial to it. The process of unfolding was to be read in every part of him—eyes, face, clothes, and so on.

In his modest little flat off the Smolensk Boulevard we often talked over some of the new things with which he is concerned



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nowadays. The low-ceilinged room in which we sat and the adjoining one were bare, that is, with a Japanese bareness, save for an artistic symbol here and there—a futurist portrait of himself, and some odds and ends of expressionism on the walls, a working model of constructionist scenery, bright-coloured draperies on the spaciouly inviting couch—all projections of his individuality, as it were, all saying something about the man. He was usually at breakfast when I called, and he made no fuss because I walked in unannounced on each occasion. Nowadays intrusion has no terrors for the Russian theatre director. Unlike his English prototype, he does not conceal himself behind locked doors. Accessibility is the new business note introduced by the Revolution. All who move in high places are at the service of all who move in low ones. They make no bones about being seen, simply because they would very quickly be brought into contact with a withering current of the workers' mind that would seriously interfere with the peace of their own. It may be that the word "comrade" exercises a patent influence. At any rate, it is a word which everyone uses in Russia.

The open door, the simple surroundings, the plain breakfast of eggs and black bread, and the figure in working-class wear were, I think, the things that struck me most. Then there was a very fascinating child who came in suddenly when we were talking, and clambered on Meierhold's lap and then on mine. It was carrying a large bunch of sky-blue flowers, which it held forth and expected us to embrace with effusion. Altogether a delightful incident. On more than one occasion I noticed with admiration how the Russian children seem to enter closely into the lives of the representative men. There is Lunacharsky who is seldom far from his little son, who is very precious to him. Perhaps it is not to be wondered at, for these are the men who understand the value of doing everything they can for the children. It is they who have set them frolicking in the parks and open spaces, in the theatre, in the forest schools, and among the tall grasses in the orchards and cornfields beneath the Urals.

There was much in the external appearance of Meierhold to denote his character and to suggest his aims. In the half-drawn eyelids and dreamy look one found a touch of mysticism; in the high brow, mentality; in the short, abundant, dark

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hair, vigour and livingness. In the prominent nose, with its suspicion of a Jewish accent, one discovered concrete possibilities. In other features, in manner and movement, one detected quickness of feeling, intensity, concentration, enduringness in aim and work, yet at the same time a certain lack of stability—I mean the changeableness and unreliability of a man who does not keep his word, who believes firmly in a thing to-day and begins to doubt it to-morrow, and leaves it the day after for another—altogether a strange mixture of the qualities of perseverance, inconstancy, optimism and of excessive sensibility to impressions, that revealed a nervous, sanguine temperament. In short, he gave me the impression of a man who is standing on the threshold of Reality and is prevented from entering by a material disposition. Look how earnestly and with what assiduity and perseverance he has sought the inner spirit of drama and acting, and with what passion he has become a convert to communism—two things as far apart as the poles. The one is a mystical pursuit; the other a political one. Slightly above medium height, and of a fairly robust build, he appeared capable of concentrating on and carrying out very arduous work.

If some rather puzzling characteristics and contradictions show themselves in personal acquaintance with Meierhold, what does a study of his training and work reveal? Simply that he has devoted himself to the accomplishment of a single object, has shown great constancy of purpose, and throughout has brought a logical imagination to bear upon it. Beyond this he has been apt to ride a relay of extremes. But always with spirit, always keeping the great pace, with ever tightening of girth and rebuckling of cheek strap.

Vsevolod Emilyevitch Meierhold comes from a small Russian provincial town Penza, near Saratov, on the Volga. His family were very rich. He is of German stock, his mother being a German from Riga, his father a German from Silencia. The latter was a business man who made a fortune out of the manufacture of vodka. His mother had an artistic disposition. She was very fond of theatricals, dancing and music. So in the Meierhold home there was always these art influences at work. Moreover, it was a centre for writers, musicians, players, etc., with whom young Meierhold mixed freely. During this

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period he was much attracted by children's theatricals, in which he took part. He was on the threshold of the theatrical and musical world. From his mother he derived a taste for art and perhaps that touch of imaginative mysticism which has shown itself all along; from his father, a certain business capacity which doubtless manifested itself in his theatrical undertakings; from his grandmother, Mdle. Varley, a French comedienne, influences which doubtless changed him from a merchant to a theatre reformer. Where his restless and fantastical anarchism came from is not clear.

From home Meierhold went to college, where he moved in an amateur theatrical society. Next we find him at the university, where his attention is divided between two interests—the study of law and a passion for the theatre. The latter had a good deal of joy for him, and he often took his way to the State theatre to study its wonders. Apparently there was no joy in law—who has ever found there is—for after a year's grappling with its terrors he gave it up. Doubtless he was of so different a calibre from the lawyer, full of eager life, longed for the emotional adventures which never touch the legal mind. None the less his law training succeeded in giving his mind a logical bent which was expressed in his theatrical development, and which might reasonably account for his dissatisfaction and break with the Moscow Art theatre realistic emotionalism at a later date.

In 1898 he became a pupil at the musical-dramatic Philharmonic School at Moscow. It was here that his direct association with the theatre may be said to have begun. The chief director of the school was Vladimir Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, who subsequently established the Moscow Art theatre in co-operation with Stanislavsky. One of Meierhold's fellow-pupils was Miss Knipper, who became the wife of Tchekov, and was mainly responsible for awakening Meierhold's interest in his plays.

In 1898 he left the school, having finished his preliminary studies. In the same year Dantchenko and Stanislavsky embarked on their epoch-making adventure. They started the Moscow Art theatre organisation, and Meierhold joined it as an actor. He then made the acquaintance of Tchekov and his plays. It will be remembered that the Moscow Art theatre

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made its first great success with Tchekov's "Seagull." In grateful remembrance of the event the directors added a seagull to the theatre's coat-of-arms. Whenever the company takes its flight abroad the seagull goes with them. But not always the play. It is not being presented during the present world tour of the company. While the bird flutters its wings on the act-drop and hovers over the orchestra, the play is slumbering in Moscow. It would be entertaining to hear what the bird says about this.

From 1898 to 1902 Meierhold spent four years at the Moscow Art theatre learning his business. He showed a particular interest in Tchekov. This author appealed to him for what reason is shown in the chapter on Meierhold's theatre, where the story of his development, technical and other, and the influences operating on him, is continued.

I came into contact with Lunacharsky under entirely different circumstances from those which brought me to Meierhold. I had only to walk into Meierhold's ever-open parlour, as it were, to see him. But I had to gain access to a Government fortress to see Lunacharsky. This did not mean that the latter was less accessible. It meant that he had his quarters in the Kremlin, which for political and military reasons was closed to the public. The first time I arranged to call I was told to be at his office at eleven o'clock punctually. I went through a number of formalities, of which I was fairly sick by this time, having had several years of them in all parts of Europe. There was the business of getting a pass to the Kremlin, and after my interview a pass from Lunacharsky to leave it, of satisfying sentries and all sorts and conditions of people I met on my way to the particular block of buildings used by the Ministry of Education, and so on. In spite of these delays I was punctual, but Lunacharsky was not. No official in Soviet Russia ever is punctual. Once when I complained about being kept and wasting my time, I was told I was to blame. I ought to have known, someone pointed out, that I was expected to arrive from half an hour to an hour late.

I did not take the lesson to heart. I had formed a strict habit of punctuality, and I was always punctual. The result was that I usually found myself kicking my heels in Government offices long before anyone arrived. It was not always time

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wasted, however, for I had an opportunity to look about me and to note the many and varied strange transformations which these places and the people who came to them had undergone. I read many an interesting story in interiors which had passed from aristocratic to proletarian owners under circumstances calculated to make the hair stand on end.

This was not the case, however, with the offices used for the Ministry of Education. There was very little change or adaptation to be seen. Indeed, the absence of the touch of vandalism, if I might call it so, was the first thing that took my notice. And, as we shall see presently, it was a guide to the psychology of Lunacharsky itself. It was a manifestation of his interest in old cultural forms and his almost excessive desire to preserve them. Another interesting psychological indication appeared in the external architecture. The Kremlin is made up of all sorts of architectural styles. The section occupied by the Minister of Popular Education and Art is the most picturesque and decorative. It forms a picture by itself, as it were, of coloured and richly ornamented Eastern architecture, and would be just the sort of thing to delight a mind disposed towards traditional forms of art and culture. The interior took me closer and closer to the characteristics of Lunacharsky. Owing to my rigid habit of punctuality I had plenty of time, on this occasion two hours, to study my bearings and their meaning, human and other.

The room in which I waited formed the waiting-room, and led directly into Lunacharsky's "office." It was a very elegant white and gold apartment supported by three classical columns. As far as I could judge it was in the same condition as when occupied by royalty, and in this respect showed a marked contrast to the terribly mutilated condition of certain other interiors of former palaces and palatial mansions now used as Government offices. The splendid black ebony grand piano, the charming gold console and mirror, the dainty chairs were unharmed, and played their part in maintaining the old aristocratic atmosphere. The aristocratic style was perfect. Here was another psychological clue. Clearly there was someone present who was actively engaged in preserving objects of historical and cultural value. One sign of change appeared in a rather thick layer of greasy finger-marks on the top of the

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grand piano where the proletarians had laid their hands. It reminded me of the film of grease deposited by the lips of the faithful on the glass of the paintings of our Lord in the Russian chapels. Another sign was the shock-headed and unwashed youth who sat at a desk just outside Lunacharsky's door, and took messages, telephone calls, cigarettes, and any other bribes you liked to offer him. Another sign was the queer women, looking like factory hands, who dashed in and out of ante-rooms, obviously doing office-work. Finally, there was the crowd of restless people waiting to see Lunacharsky, all very plainly dressed, most wearing the Soviet standardised costume, house-blouse, top-boots and cap, and many of them clearly workers. Here again were two psychological indications in the unconventional staff, and the working-class callers who formed little groups and eagerly discussed cultural and educational problems while they waited. With these exceptions and just one other there was nothing to show that royalty or its followers were not still occupying these State apartments. On the console there was a pile of new books newly arrived from various foreign countries—Germany, France and England. At first glance one might have taken them for reading matter which had been left behind by the old aristocracy in their flight. Certainly the French yellow-backs supported this impression. But their titles showed they were something different. Among them I saw Romain Rolland's "Wolf" and Toller's "Machine Wreckers," and so I recognised that these books were the furniture of a revolutionary mind and not one fashioned by Tsarist ambition. I was quite startled to have this particular bent of Lunacharsky's mind jumping at me. For it was a communistic sign which did not agree with the other evidences of a cultivated mind.

As I sat waiting and observing, Lunacharsky came out twice to take telephone calls. On the first occasion I sought to approach him but was intercepted by a wild woman who was also anxious to talk to him. She had been waiting some time, pacing the room feverishly and preparing a long ultimatum which she wrote by fits and starts, using the office desk, paper, pens and ink for the purpose, and without as much as a by-your-leave to anyone. Evidently Lunacharsky satisfied her, for her manner changed and her short, stubbly hair calmed down,

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while her complexion resumed its normal greenish-grey pallor. Having presented her ultimatum she rushed off.

In appearance Lunacharsky matched the scenery, so to speak. Viewed from a distance he was just what I expected him to be. Physically he was of the vital type, exhibiting abundant restless and unceasing action. Energetic to the point of excess, as are all the new organisers and administrators called forth by the Revolution. There is Chicherin, for instance, who never seems to sleep. He does most of his work throughout the night when other men are in bed. The aristocratic head, with its strong contour, lofty brow, restless but attractive eyes that one felt saw some good in the world even if they also saw a considerable amount of fatigue, and the dark pointed beard, more French than Russian in its poise—these were just the things one looked for in a cultural minister. Added to them was a touch of the labour leader—a general air of being one of a class on behalf of whose culture he was fighting. On the whole, Lunacharsky's appearance was that of a man possessing the vital-nervous temperament capable of attacking big problems, of sustained effort, and of exercising a strong cultural and moral influence in harmony with his particular cultural and moral convictions.

In the interval between my peeps at him and my interview with him I recalled some of his earlier doings, and tried to fit them into the frame of his present life. Once upon a time he was a sonneteer, and wrote verse which revealed an intense feeling for his own soil and an optimism which it is hard nowadays to share:

“ Oh, happy earth. Out of the bloody generations,  
Life yet will blossom, innocent wise.  
And then, my plant shall be cleansed of lamentations,  
A jade-green star in the moon silvered skies.”

In those days remotely distant from the Great Revolution there may not have been a deliberate intention in Lunacharsky's mind to take part in revolutionary work, to stir his fellow-men with a penetrating cultural-education, to throw off the fetters of ignorance that bind them to their task-masters. Probably his culture and extreme æsthetic sensibility would cause him to shrink from revolutionary work of this or any kind.

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If so, is it a matter for wonder that he has finally and definitely engaged in the fight for culture? Perhaps not in view of the fact that he left Russia in 1905 or thereabout, and for a time followed the fortunes of Lenin, to whom he has always been peculiarly loyal. It may be that Lenin introduced him to the closest study of Marx. At any rate, he showed the greatest interest in and sympathy with the theories of the German socialist, and there is little in his cultural-educational work in Soviet Russia that is not based on his genuine appreciation of, or the desire to realise Marxian principles which he thinks deserve to be realised. Then came the Revolution to promote many significant personalities, and there was Lenin to discover the stuff of which the New Russia was, in his opinion, to be made. This meant Lunacharsky's inclusion with Lenin himself in the Council of the People's Commissars, and his appointment as the People's Commissar of Education. Subsequently he was also made Minister of Art. The latter appointment is said to have been the result of Lunacharsky's passion for culture and Lenin's quick discernment of character. The story goes that Lunacharsky heard that the famous Pine Apple Church in the Red Square, Moscow, had been destroyed during a battle between the Reds and the Whites. He was so affected by the news of the wanton destruction of this wonderful work of art that he became seriously ill and resigned from the Government. Lenin went to see him, and in view of this extraordinary attachment to Art, induced him to reconsider his decision, and to become Minister of Art as well. The story may or may not be true. The fact remains that this church was not destroyed but exists to-day. Another version of the story is that Lunacharsky heard that an old historical cathedral was to be bombarded because it harboured anti-revolutionists and machine guns. Lunacharsky threatened to throw up his commission if this was done, as he did not want to be accused of taking part in destroying cathedrals. Thus Lunacharsky, a Maximalist in spirit, was governed by the artist in him. The same sentiment appears in the preservation of the imperial black eagles which crown the Kremlin domes. At the intercession of Lunacharsky they have been allowed to remain, while so much else has been destroyed, because in his view they complete the artistic design of the architecture.



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Glancing through his career as Culture Minister I found him affirming Art and showing almost a fanatical regard for the preservation of its masterpieces. It is no secret that he has played the guardian angel of art treasures in Russia, and has protected and preserved a priceless inheritance. This is revealed in the theatre, new and old. It was no easy task, in face of the mad desire for the destruction of works of art expressing even in a remote way the taste of the old ruling class. Such a desire made the burning of precious libraries, the sacking of palaces, the mutilation of art galleries, the wholesale destruction of time-honoured cathedrals and churches, almost a religious duty in the eyes of those possessed by it. Affirming education also, and promoting it by planning and executing a vast educational campaign. Affirming culture, and seeking a distinct form belonging to the workers. One proof of this may be found in the numerous articles which he contributed to the proletarian publications between 1918 and 1921. The "Bulletin" and "Proletarian Culture," for instance, contain articles by him. There are two or three in particular that deserve to be studied:<sup>1</sup> "Proletcult and Soviet Cultural Work," "Problem of Socialistic Culture," and <sup>2</sup> "The Beginning of Proletarian Æsthetic." But I doubt whether these publications are to be had nowadays. I obtained my copies in Russia four years ago. When I enquired for some in 1922 I was told they were out of print. The present-day organ of the Proletcult movement is "The Forge" ("Gorn"). It contains articles on the theories and practice of art, the theatre, poetry, etc. Besides affirming Art, Education and Culture, Lunacharsky was affirming Poetry and Literature, and engaging in both. Affirming Drama, too, and writing plays, in which Cromwell and Marx and Bakunin are given a reading in harmony with the communist spirit prevailing in Lunacharsky. Of course, affirming the theatre and re-organising it according to a new conception. In a way, too, he affirmed Religion, strange as it may sound in one who stood for a revolutionary movement based largely on communistic ideas. I remember reading in a German book,<sup>3</sup> which was given to me by its author, an account

<sup>1</sup> "Proletcult Biblioticka." "Pod Znama Proletculture." 1920.

<sup>2</sup> "Proletarian Culture." 11 and 12, 1919.

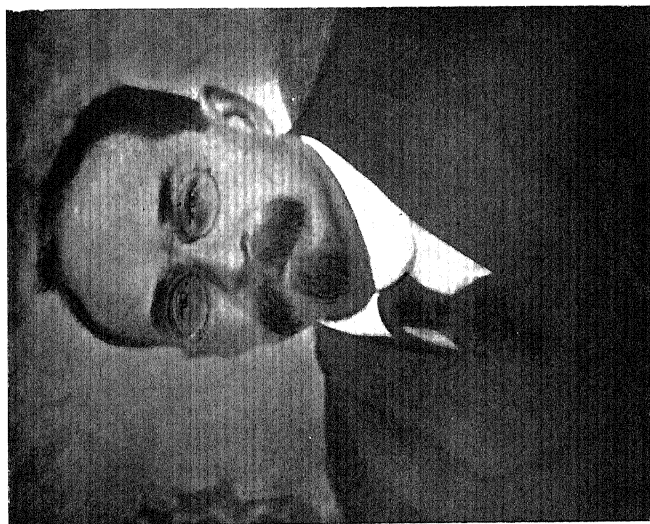
<sup>3</sup> "Drei Monat in Sowjet Russland," by Arthur Holitscher.

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of a series of public discussions on religion between the critics and defenders of the old God, which took place in the Big Theatre, the Dome Soyusov and the Trade Unions headquarters. Lunacharsky, who took part in them, "dethroned God." He brought his fist down, and said he would have none of the old God. He charged Him with being unjust, a class God, and so on. But Lunacharsky does not "dethrone God," he draws a distinction between the old and the new God. In other words, he denies certain harmful attributes of God. In earlier days Lunacharsky showed a religious sympathy in certain of his writings dealing with religious economy, which Lenin, his friend, viewed with extreme horror, and said so in his book on "Materialism and Empiricism." It is very doubtful if a man with Lunacharsky's cultivation and intellectual qualities could consistently "dethrone God."

At last, at 12.30 I was admitted to the Holy of Holies, and thus my game of comparative analysis was brought to a close. This and subsequent interviews confirmed my impression of Lunacharsky. His sanctum was as elegant and well-preserved as the waiting-room. Probably the soft carpet, the rich draperies, the works of art, were contributions from the pre-revolution period. Lunacharsky's contributions were himself, a woman secretary, and a very imposing writing desk placed near a window overlooking the Kremlin. Pacing this State apartment at a great speed, he told me something about his plan of cultural-education. He is, it seems, consumed by two passions: to educate the people, and to preserve art and drama forms. As an outcome there is a conception of the school and theatre as a joint instrument for the liberation of the coming generation from the influence of the bourgeois ideology. With his educational reforms in the school this book has nothing to do, except to imply that the essential basis of these reforms is the same in both institutions—the school and theatre. Both rest on Marxism as the basis of a proletarian cultural-education. This culture of the proletariat struggling to free themselves is a class culture, and it is, therefore, assumed to be based on strife. Moreover, it has a romantic tendency, because classes striving for self-expression are said to be romantic, and their romanticism possesses the typical characteristics of the "storm and stress" period, like, for instance, the



Two of the dominating personalities of the New Theatre. At the left, A. Lunacharsky, Minister of Education and Art and the head of the Centre or Government group of theatres. At the right, V. E. Meierhold, one of the old intellectuals, now at the head of the Left or Revolutionary Group.

*Photo by Author.*



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one that marked Germany during Goethe's early life. So we have the unusual spectacle of a theatre (Lunacharsky's) trying to establish itself on a mixture of the old and the new—the old which had not been decomposed by the new. The building materials are popular cultural-education, romantic heroism, Marxian interpretation of social phenomena, sociology and political economy, the elements of a positive philosophical conception of the world. So the theatre under Lunacharsky assumes a new role of great importance in the struggle of the Russian people for a new world. It has opened its door and admitted the workers to play with their own toys—the social and industrial instincts, impulses and emotions stirred into activity by the Revolution and machine factory world, and directed by the psychology of Lunacharsky himself.

Of the third personality, Constantin Sergeievitch Stanislavsky (otherwise Alexeieff), not much can be said that has not been said many times. Unlike either Meierhold or Lunacharsky, Stanislavsky is comparatively a much-advertised person. He and his Moscow Art theatre and its organisation have been written about <sup>1</sup>“in innumerable books in all languages” ever since they first became fully known to Western Europe and America in the early years of this century. There is very little to be added to the pre-war record of the development of himself and his theatre. The development practically came to an end before 1914. While Meierhold and Lunacharsky continued to extend their individualities, Stanislavsky stood still. The pre-war development was of a form and of an organisation suited to it. Stanislavsky's attention to form largely marked him out among contemporary producers. But it was his own form. Form was the man. And all in his theatre had his peculiar individual note. And it was a form that was born and bred in a far different atmosphere from that of the Revolution and its after events. It was, in fact, a bourgeois form belonging to a somewhat rare bourgeois personality. In this sense it was a dead, not a living form.

This form went quite naturally with the old order. It expressed the emotional qualities of Stanislavsky, summed up his characteristics, and told us all we wanted to know about a rather wonderful theatrical figure who had built up a theatre

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for his own use and had deliberately deprived it of contact with the life of the people. He refused to make it life-centred. We might perhaps expect this of one born in Moscow of wealthy bourgeois parents. And there was nothing in his training to indicate that he would do otherwise. He had an uneventful career at college, followed by a course of study in singing at the Paris Conservatoire. Probably he intended to be a singer. Probably, too, his fine dignified presence actively assisted him in this intention. At any rate, in the third stage of his career we find him starting a modest theatrical circle composed of the rich Muscovite bourgeoisie in association with Nemirovitch-Dantchenko. There were performances at the Chasseurs' Club and the society of Artists and Litterateurs. But for some time Stanislavsky continued to assist in his wealthy father's business, and divided his energies between selling the gold "decorations" which adorn the vestments of the Russian clergy, and recruiting actors for the elite. Then began the Moscow Art theatre. Here we have two facts which point to strong conservative characteristics: his choice of the Conservatoire and of a bourgeois dramatic circle.

Stanislavsky has remained comparatively and practically stationary throughout the War and Revolution periods. He is of the old bourgeois anarchist order. He has preserved almost unchanged a mind pre-occupied with the theatrical habits of peacetime. Frankly, he does not like the Revolution, and the only thing he is inclined to do for it is to respect it because this is the only thing left for grey hairs in Soviet Russia. Dealing with the Revolution and its affect on him and his theatre, he once observed to me that he was very thankful to it for leaving him his theatre intact. But he did not know what to do with the latter. He had no more experiments to make. The communists would not come to see his plays with which he had established his fame. They simply scoffed at Tchekov's big plays. They had no use for their analysis of sugar and watery emotions. But difficult as it was for him to draw an audience or to adapt his repertory to the requirements of existing circumstances, he was absolutely convinced that his theatre, detached as it was from the life current, was serving the interest of the best form of drama and enriching the culture of the worker. He felt clearly that his theatre was performing a very

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useful purpose by taking the people out of the cold, dark streets and enriching them with a large helping of Stanislavsky himself. It was an opinion that agreed with Stanislavsky's egotism.

His firm belief in the cultural value of his own theatre was shared by Lunacharsky, who made arrangements for its preservation as he would for objects of historical interest in the museums. He did so in spite of the fact that fundamentally this theatre was right off the proper or living track. Before the war it had got on a curiously wrong track and has been very reluctant to leave it. Every effort had been used to make it more life-centred and to bring it into the scheme of the new national life, into the current of social life. But this has not appealed to Stanislavsky, who would rather guard his own ideals. So the present-day value of Stanislavsky's theatre to the new Russian theatre is that it preserves some traditions, for instance, the round-table study, which are helpful to the workers. At the same time a good deal about it is old-fashioned. The workers have already gone beyond it by introducing a method of reforming the physique as well as the mentality of the actor. Its Studios are of more value. They form small experimental stages of the highest order, where ideas belonging to the extreme Left are tried out and passed on to the more conservative stages of the extreme Right. Just as in Germany the little experimental theatres have played a very important part in introducing new ideas to the State theatres, thence to the commercial theatres, and thence to the general public. Otherwise such ideas would have remained unknown. There is much in his personal appearance and manner that reflects the characteristics of the Moscow Art theatre. A year or two after the Revolution I sat talking to him in the garden attached to a small rehearsal theatre. To me he looked very much like an anachronism, if I may use the term without offence. He had a terribly depressed manner. He said that art, literature and the theatre were stagnant, which was no doubt true from his point of view, though not from any other. He was working with the communists but did not agree with them. To him his theatre had no value outside himself. His passion for realistic detail came out in his references to our surroundings and his clothes. He apologised for not having a more gorgeous

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place for an interview. He was terribly concerned about his clothes. I do not know why. To me he appeared to be wearing quite a decent suit, consisting of a black morning coat, fancy waistcoat and dark-striped trousers. He sadly called my attention to his trousers. I did not see much wrong with them. True, they were a little frayed at the edges, and had a bagginess at the knee which a rhinoceros might envy. But, all the same they were what the "Tailor and Cutter" would call aristocratic in intention. I do not know much about smart wear, and perhaps for this reason I shall be forgiven if I say that I considered Stanislavsky's get-up rather a swell one for Soviet Russia, where people are fashionably dressed if they look like a walking rag-bag.

But it was characteristic of the man to be so downhearted about a matter that was of no importance in a country where everything had been overturned, and the old bourgeois ideals for which Stanislavsky stood had been swept completely away. Here peeped out the theatrical director who pays a great deal of attention to the "scene," and reveals a passion for realistic detail.

I was also struck by his cultivation and refinement. Here again were two characteristics which he has translated in terms of the theatre. He has brought great refinement into the theatre and has imparted to it his own brand of culture. He has made dramatic productions rest on refinement and culture. He has realised Nemirovitch-Dantchenko's idea that the actor should be before all things an artist, and in this and other ways has done something to improve the mentality of the actor. He has introduced a system of dramatic education resting on unified and prolonged study of a play. He has specialised on an actualistic kind of scenic refinement. But it must be repeated that this refinement and culture belong to other times. The contemporary Russian Radicals respect them mostly at a distance. The truth is, they belong to a form which is incapable of containing the social content which the Revolution has set swiftly in motion.

Altogether, then, the character of Stanislavsky forms the foundation of his theatre, as the characters of Meierhold and Lunacharsky form the foundations of their theatres. Stanislavsky is the balancing factor between the Centre and Right, as





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Four very important directing personalities of the New Theatre. 1. A. M. Granovsky, of the Central Jewish Theatre. 2. P. M. Kergentseff, formerly Soviet Consul for Stockholm. An active worker on behalf of the New Mass Theatre. 3. Madam Henrietta Pascal, director of the World's First State Children's Theatre, Moscow. 4. Pletnev, Worker-President of the Moscow Proletcult and Workers' Theatre. He is a theorist, essayist, playwright and organiser.



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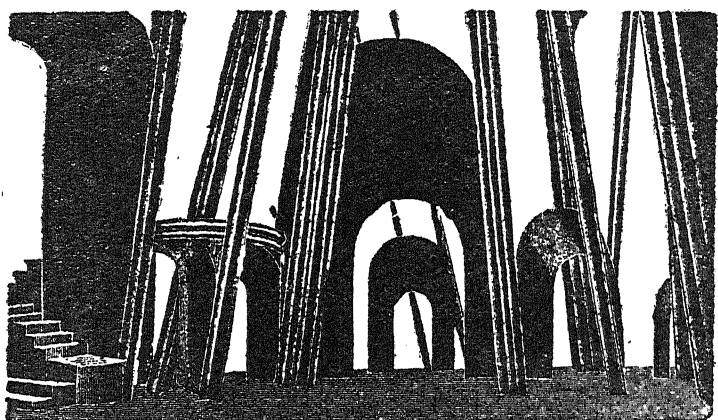
Lunacharsky is the balancing factor between the Left and Right.

I have considered the three dominating personalities in the new Russian theatre. Of course, there are other notable personalities who have fingers in this rather rich pie. There are, for instance, Pletnev of the Proletcult theatre, Foregger of the theatre of Revolutionary Satire, and Tairov of the Moscow Kamerny theatre. Each will be considered in connection with his own theatre.



FOREGGER.

Director of the Mastfor Theatre.



Korsch Theatre. Scene for Schiller's *Don Carlos*, showing the industrial form of scenery influencing a conventional theatre.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LEFT GROUP

#### (i)—MEIERHOLD'S THEATRE, OR THE THEATRE OF REVOLUTION

THE Left theatre is in general conceived of as a Workers' theatre. That is, a theatre intended for the use of the new Russian working-class population, in which they can give adequate and efficient expression to their vivified impulses, emotions, radical thought and action, to their life raised to a higher power of significance, and can learn how to raise the level of their own dramatic and art interpretative power, and so reach a higher level of achievement. Simply, it is a creative means to make themselves intelligible and attractive to the nation. Like the Centre and Right wing of the structure, it is fashioned by the ideas of the Revolution

## MEIERHOLD'S THEATRE

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operating on the dramatic instincts of the workers, and actuating the expediency of their leaders.

It is capable of two main divisions:—(1) The theatres under the direction of the old anarcho-intelligentsia, who are working on behalf of the worker but support professionalism; (2) the theatres under the direction of the workers themselves, who exclude professionalism in favour of voluntarism. Included in this division are the various arenas in which the spontaneous dramatic exhibitions of the people, such as open-air mass plays, festivals and demonstrations take place.

The two divisions are actuated by one motive: to make of the theatre an open creative playground for everyone instead of a reserved enclosure for shopkeepers, gamblers and egoists. But they differ as to methods. They want to make the theatre a functional part of the spectator, one of the engines of the great social machine, but they do not agree how it is to be done. Hence arises sub-divisions of the two main divisions. Each of these has a technique of its own. Each technique or instrument of expression is composed of four parts, embodying four problems:—(1) System of Acting; (2) Species of Play; (3) Form of Stage; (4) Style of Scenery. Each technique will be considered in connection with the theatre that applies it. All the methods are, however, influenced more or less by Meierhold's activities. For this reason it may be said that Meierhold is the leader of the Left Group.

Nowadays Meierhold personifies communism. In this and other ways the Left Group expresses the developments of that audacious director, and exhibits the influences which have acted upon him. Meierhold is a revolutionary, and has been throughout the twenty-five years he has been associated with the theatre. He is one of those exceptional men of the theatre who has passed from stage to stage of revolutionary experience, has turned over to the Bolsheviks in time of Revolution, joined hands with them, been imprisoned by the Whites, been a Red Soldier, been pelted with mud by anti-revolutionists, has then adapted his revolutionary experiences, theatrical and communist, to the theatre, and at length has taken charge of three or four big playhouses, where he is able to apply revolutionary methods of his own, and to exert a powerful influence on theatrical organisations which have arisen through the initiative

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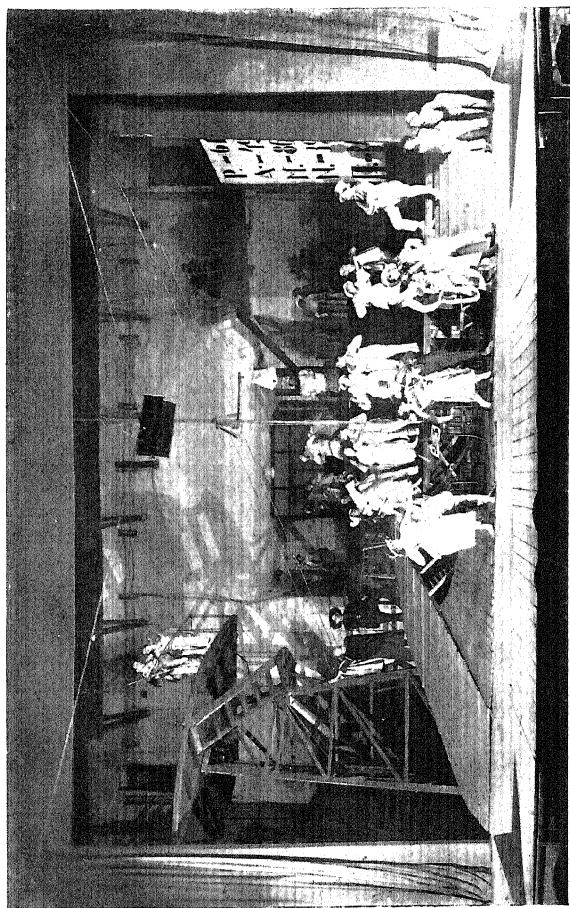
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of individual and groups of communists, and on theatrical workers of a more individualistic and conservative character with a leaning towards the Left.

Meierhold conceives of the theatre not as an expression of initiation, reasoned or other, into, or the mere re-shaping of the actualities of life. To him it is an expression of an evolutionary creative power which urges the possessor to reject old forms in order that he may attain the essential one. With Meierhold it is an imaginative or a mystical form of unity. Apparently he seeks to unite the spectator and actor in such a way that for a time the latter becomes the actor and undergoes his experience. Really he wants the spectator to become the author and completely to undergo his experience. In a manner of speaking, he wants the stage and auditorium mystically mated, so that the experience of the one merges in that of the other, and the spectator and player are lost in the ecstasy of an obliterating embrace. Plainly the aim of this conception is to give the spectator the maximum of a dramatic production and communication, and to inspire him with whatever high ideals they happen to contain. Such an aim, if realised and employed in the battle of communism, would become a very powerful instrument for overcoming opposition and winning adherents to the communist cause, especially if its appeal is to the imagination. For most men the appeal of the imagination is resistless. It converts them to an idea, good or bad, in spite of themselves.

Meierhold has always sought to place the imagination in authority over the theatre and its audience. In every stage of his development he has tried to pull the theatre to pieces and re-shape it as a generator capable of generating and transmitting to the spectator the greatest amount of the spirit of life. But it was a thing he could not do until he had mastered the secret of the union of author, actor and spectator, and was set free to make the theatre something far different from what it is.

If we examine his development we shall find that it wholly rests upon a search for a unifying symbol to communicate the highest form of dramatic expression. He has tried the old symbols one after the other and found them inadequate to interpret the new experience of life which ever seeks to flow into the theatre to be expressed in dramatic form. You cannot



MEIERHOLD'S THEATRE.

*Masse-Mensch (Crowd-Man)*, Act II., by Ernst Toller, as produced by Meierhold. The industrial and mechanical setting is conditioned by the changing mass psychology of the play. The arrangement of levels and lighting for grouping, and the orchestra suspended up right are very ingenious and helpful.





## MEIERHOLD'S THEATRE

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satisfactorily pour this new experience into old forms of expression, any more than you can satisfactorily pour the old experiences into new forms of expression. Invariably the question to Meierhold has been how to raise the level of interpretative power in the theatre so that none of the dramatic meaning of a significant play is lost. Or, in other words, which are the best means of converting the spectator into the creative author in such a way that he experiences all that the creative author has experienced.

This may have been Meierhold's starting point. At any rate it has become his aim. If we carefully study his twenty-five years of adventures—the twenty-fifth anniversary of his "revolutionary" theatrical life has just been celebrated with much drum-beating by the communists in the Russian theatre—we shall find that it has become his fixed aim. We shall find, too, that his career in pursuit of this aim has been consistent. His development has been logical, and it needed only the Revolution and things made possible by this shattering event, to enable him to carry his aim to an extreme where he could work it out more adequately and efficiently.

A previous chapter has told the story of Meierhold's development to the time when he became a member of the Moscow Art theatre company. The continuation of the story down to the present time may be told in stages revealing (1) the influences which have acted upon him during years of attempts to find new forms; (2) the new ideas and principles arising therefrom; and (3) their application to and in the theatre.

1898. **ACTUALISM.** Meierhold joined the Moscow Art theatre company on its formation. In the December of this year he "created" the part of Treplef in Tchekov's "The Seagull." In February, 1901, he "created" another Tchekov character, Baron Tuzenbach in "The Three Sisters." After three years' study at the M. A. T. he left it for a short tour in the provinces, where he went in search of new forms.

1902. He returned to the M. A. T. Finally he left it thoroughly dissatisfied with its method. At this time he was fully engaged with the problem of the function of and response to dramatic expression. To him it

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appeared that Stanislavsky's actualistic form of expression confined expression to the stage and drew no response from the spectator. The business of dramatic expression was, in his opinion, to communicate itself to the spectator, and the aim of the producer should, therefore, be to promote increased powers of dramatic communication. This means that Meierhold had learnt that for Stanislavsky the audience did not exist. He was satisfied so long as he had a stage and a company to work with. He was in the position of the studio painter who produces little easel pictures in the seclusion of his studio-cell which have no relation to the wider world without it. With Meierhold it was different. He discovered the audience, and his discovery took him from the centre of the stage to the centre of the auditorium, from the little world of Stanislavsky into a new world of imagination and widest achievement of his own and the spectator's.

September, 1902. TCHEKOV. He made a start for himself, and organised a company. He opened at Sebastopol with the "Three Sisters." He went to other places playing Tchekov. He then had a short season at the small provincial town of Cherson, near Odessa. He was trying to rid himself of Stanislavsky's actualism.

1903. MEININGEN. He went to Italy, where he was under the Meiningen influence.<sup>1</sup>

1904-5. CONDITIONALISM. From Italy he returned to Cherson, and then went to Tiflis where he produced "The Death of Ivan the Terrible," and "The Acrobats," by Chenton. He continued to search for a significant form of dramatic communication, and to examine the existing forms as he met them. Though his work at Cherson showed traces of the Meiningen influence, it revealed that he was now turning definitely toward conditionalism and the Conditional theatre. Meierhold's reason for breaking with actualism and adopting conditionalism, or "conventionalism" as it is called

<sup>1</sup>For description of the Meiningen system see chapter on Stanislavsky's Theatre.

outside Russia, was that the latter was more suited to his purpose of breaking down the barrier between the stage and the auditorium. In his view the new dramatic experience which was springing up did not need the actualistic handling; it was too complex and had far too many details. The aim of actualism to express the "real" life, that is, life as it is actually lived, simply conceals the inner spirit of life. Metaphysically it holds up the thing to view but conceals the activity behind the thing. Meierhold was of the opinion that a production should exhibit the activity or spirit, and for this purpose should be simple, highly concentrated and abstract, and not heavily charged with details, diffuse and verbose, if it is to be a perfect spirit communication. Accordingly he sought to put the activity or spirit on the stage in place of the thing or "real life." It is here, he thinks, that conditionalism begins on the stage, which it is necessary to develop to the utmost. Conditionalism is then the activity or spirit attributed to a thing. The activity or spirit is abstracted by the producer who conditions all the objects and agents of representation and interpretation with it. For example, the activity that moves us in the "Midsummer Night's Dream" is the spirit of joy. Hence everything in the production must be conditioned by the spirit of joy. So the problem with which the Conditional theatre confronted him was, how to realise the condition of spiritual unity in each play in such a way as to break down the separation of the stage from the spectator which the school of Stanislavsky so strongly emphasised. He may be said to have seen the stage from a new starting-point, thus making for a new departure in play-production hitherto so heavily handicapped by old and new forms of disunity. His conclusion was that the new departure was only possible in Moscow.

1905. THE MYSTIC THEATRE. He decided to go to Moscow, where he proposed to develop the Conditional theatre. But unluckily for one reason and luckily for another he chose an unfavourable time. A revolution

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was just starting, and no one had any time for the theatre. Previous to going to Moscow he had made Maeterlinck's "Death of Tintagel" the subject of his new experiment. He carefully prepared this piece for production at the Studio theatre at Moscow. But the Revolution put a stop to the production. With nothing else to do, Meierhold wandered about the streets and mixed with the revolutionary crowds, and so came under the influence of the revolutionary impulse.

December, 1905, and January, 1906. MYSTICAL ANARCHISM AND PRIMITIVENESS. He returned to Petrograd. The influence of the Revolution was to turn his thoughts in the direction of the Greek theatre and its collective expression. He went beyond this to primitiveness, which he decided to apply to Maeterlinck.

February, 1906. CONDITIONALISM AND COLLECTIVISM. He now added Greek collectivism to the Conditional theatre. He went to Tiflis for a short season to apply his ideas. Here he established a dramatic company called "The Comrades of the New Drama." He then returned to Petrograd, leaving the new company at Tiflis. Shortly after he returned to Tiflis to produce "Tintagel" in the new manner. He covered the stage with green cloth, used coloured costumes, followed the decorative ideas of Belkin, and posed the figures.

BEGINNING OF THE MYSTIC THEATRE. He found that the play was understood or experienced by the spectators, and he concluded, therefore, that he had realised the Mystic theatre for which he had been searching as a form of subtle expressiveness.

MUSICAL EXPRESSION. He now turned to develop the idea of music applied to dramatic form. He went into the country and produced Maeterlinck's "Sister Beatrice." He also produced Arthur Schnitzler's "Cry of Life." The latter had a scene which was noticeable for its great exaggeration. Meierhold provided a back-

## MEIERHOLD'S THEATRE

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ground which showed the excessive power of things. He sought to make the actors' movements resemble those of a dance. He concentrated on expressing fatal and tragic moods.

**UNITY OF ACTION.** Removal of the proscenium and the act-drop. He went to a small provincial town and produced Ibsen's "Ghosts." He removed the proscenium and drop-curtain in order to produce that feeling of intimacy in the spectator required by his conception of unity. The act-drop masks the stage. Take away the act-drop and the spectator is immediately saturated by the stage and its contents, and is thus prepared for the act of dramatic communication. This particular aid to unity has occupied Meierhold's attention more and more increasingly. It has been promoted to first place in his present-day productions. But it should be pointed out that Meierhold as well as Max Reinhardt, who is also concerned with uniting the stage and auditorium, are greatly impeded in their experiment by the serious limitations of the walled-in stage. No theatre has as yet been built that in general design, shape, size, scale, sight line and other details is calculated to promote and preserve a perfect dramatic communication between the minds of the authors, actors and spectators. Perhaps outstanding producers before making a new departure in form of expression, should make a new departure in theatre building. Of course, it is not possible to do so in Russia at present. And nothing of any importance in this direction seems to have been done in that country before the war. The Moscow Art theatre auditorium is structurally incurably old-fashioned. The section of the stage seen from the stage-boxes is less than a third of the whole, while from many parts of the auditorium quite 75 per cent. of the stage and the play is cut off. But as Stanislavsky is not concerned with the audience this does not matter. The attempt to put the auditorium levels on the stage, to which reference will be made presently, does not offer a satisfactory solution of the structural problems.

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November, 1906. **STYLISATION.** He became associated with Vera Kommissarzhevsky, the celebrated Russian actress-manageress, and continued to search for form and to exhibit various influences. One of the latter was derived from Poland, which he visited with Madam Kommissarzhevsky. While he was touring Poland he got the idea for producing Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler," and Maeterlinck's "Sister Beatrice." He was much influenced by Polish colour and the interior of the Catholic Churches. By the latter he was led to produce "Beatrice" in the early Renaissance and the Church manner. Probably it also influenced his idea of transforming the auditorium into a sort of church interior.

**ANTI-DECORATION.** On returning to Petrograd he produced a number of plays, of which three stand out on account of their handling and their success. 1. "Sister Beatrice." In all three he was concerned with "style" or "stylisation" as it is called in the so-called advanced theatre. We hear much of style nowadays in the theatre. There are two kinds: true and false. False style is the bringing together and piling up of splendours for the sake of sensational effect. There is, for instance, the Sir Herbert Tree style of His Majesty's theatre, the Sir August Harris style of Drury Lane theatre, which exhausts the stock-in-trade of costumier, wig-maker, upholsterer and many more tradesmen, and communicates nothing. Good style is the abstraction of essentials for the sake of dramatic communication. Good style on the stage has come to assume that all which belongs to the real world also belongs to the spirit or mind. It is a psychological attitude. The spectators also belong to the spirit. By understanding this it is possible to convey significant experience from one to the other in a symbolic and suggestive manner. Likewise, diffusion and waste are discouraged and concentration and creation encouraged. Generally speaking, Meierhold was concerned with good style, that is, highly effective dramatic communication. His aim in "Sister Beatrice

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was to dematerialize the stage in order to express the mystery which he felt resides in Maeterlinck's play in such a way that the spectators realised it as effectively and intensely as Maeterlinck had done. So he gave it the air of a religious service, in which the soul of the congregation is merged mystically and unconsciously, and set unfolding towards spiritual heights. The form he used was the shallow stage got by playing on the fore-part of the stage against flat decorative church-like scenery. Further, there was the use of melodic speech, and plain, precise, carved-out gesture. The plastic gestures, perhaps more than anything, suggested the inner attitudes from which they were supposed to spring. Probably this production, with its advancing stage and extreme lucidity so well adapted to destroy the separation between the stage and the spectators, strengthened the foundations of his Mystic theatre.

**STATUESQUENESS.** In other productions there were signs of a desire to break with decoration and to liberate the actor from the fetters of the background. Hitherto the tendency had been to show the actor in the flat. "Sister Beatrice" shows the actor bound, as it were, in relief against flat decorative scenery. The thing now was to show the actor in the round. This statuesqueness, or bringing the actor into the open, has much occupied the attention of Max Reinhardt. 2. "Balaganchik." In this production the scene was similar to that of the "Little Booth," by Blok, which also was a landmark. There was a shallow stage with a blue background. The actors had only typical gestures. 3. Andreieff's "Life of Man." This was played without "decoration." The walls of the auditorium were covered with grey drapery. There was only one source of light. The scheme of the furniture was much exaggerated. The make-up of the actors was mask-like. Their beards were as though sculptured. Here the aim was to communicate the sentiments and feelings of a dream. It is noteworthy that only these three productions were successful. They had the effect of dividing Petrograd

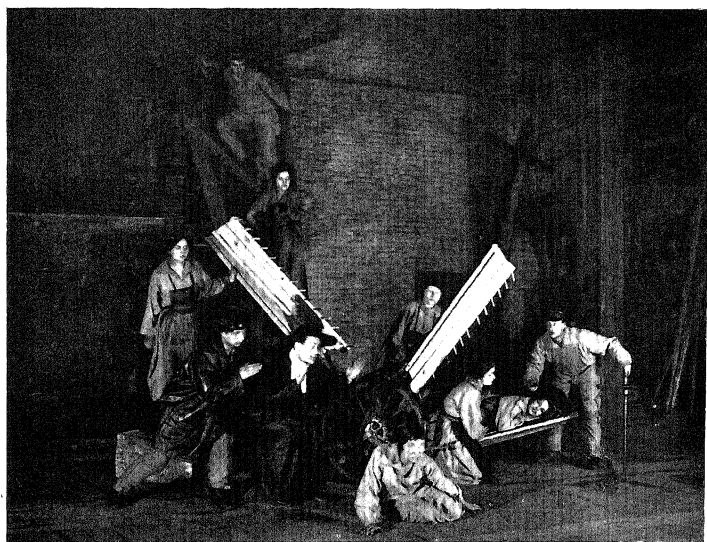
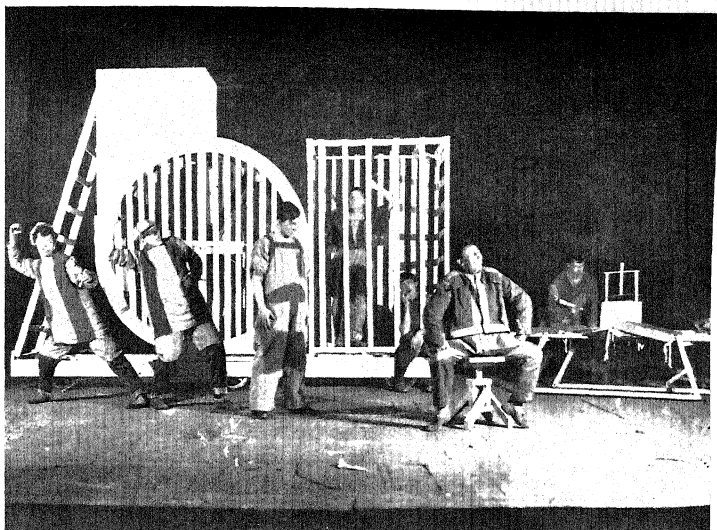
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into two camps. The Press was very unfavourable; many "high-brows" were sympathetic.

1907. MAX REINHARDT. In the spring of this year Meierhold went to Berlin with Madam Kommis-sarzhevsky, where he saw the work of the German producer, Max Reinhardt. The effect on him was to plunge him deeper into the Conditional theatre, the method of which he maintained was the only legitimate technical side of production. His new experience helped him to break with symbolical forms and to return to classical ones. Such a break was inevitable in view of his desire to concentrate on acting, to liberate the actor from the "scene," and to make him the sole intermediary between the author and the spectator, between God and man, as it were. That the actor is light (or illumination) would appear to have been Meierhold's growing conviction. A thought of the kind actuated Reinhardt who, like Meierhold, has been searching throughout his career for a true form of dramatic communication. The two producers have a resemblance, though not to the extent insisted on by some writers. They reveal marked differences. They resemble each other in the persistent pursuit of form and in their attempts to theatricalise the theatre and to dramatise the drama. Both have been mainly concerned with extracting the dramatic essence from plays, and conveying it as fully as their means would admit to the spectator. One difference lies in economic motive. Reinhardt has always sought to please, and this mainly for profit. Meierhold has sought to convert irrespective of profit. Or to put it this way: Reinhardt has aimed to establish a two-function theatre, that is, a theatre devoted to social service, perhaps of an idealistic form, and to acquisitive gain. Meierhold has been more concerned with a one-function theatre, that is, a theatre in which social service in the form of the conversion of the spectator into the likeness of the exalted author is the predominant function. Probably both were actuated by the transfiguration motive. Probably, too, one was inspired by the





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Two scenes from revolutionary plays representing the application of industrial and machine ideas. Above:—*The Death of Tarelkin*, by Soukhovo-Kobylin. Here the scene is a wooden structure representing a cell. It is entered by the ladder at the left. It is in three parts and adaptable like the stool and table. Below:—*Earth Franchising*. The final scene, in which the peasants are converted to the revolutionary idea. The threshing machine illustrates the new use of machines and tools as drama symbols. The scenery in both cases is on a bare stage with bare walls.



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glamour of gold, the other by the glamour of spirit.

1907. Later in the year Meierhold returned to Moscow, where, in conjunction with Madam Kommissarzhevsky, he produced Maeterlinck's "Sister Beatrice." Pshibuishevsky's "The Eternal Story," "Antonia" and "Balaganchik." The public showed a very great interest in these productions which raised considerable discussion. Meierhold and Kommissarzhevsky considered this their first victory in Moscow, which hitherto had been openly hostile.

September, 1907. MARIONETTE THEATRE. Another stage in Meierhold's progress appeared in the production of Wedekind's "The Awakening of Spring." It introduced a new method of breaking up the stage into three or four scenes at once. About this time he turned to the Marionette theatre in order to apply his ideas.

INTRODUCTION OF LEVELS. At this time, too, Meierhold appears to have been smitten by the idea of different stage levels. He decided to leave the primitive method which, he said, had brought him back to the Marionette theatre. Doubtless he saw in the use of levels a possible development of the statuesque form by which he sought to detach the actor from the flat scene. He produced Fyodor Sologub's "The Victory of Death," thus associating himself with a movement known as the theatre of the will based upon the idea of a single will—the will of the theatre—dominating everybody, and thus producing unity. Arising from the exercise of this will is congregate or collective action such as the congregation of a church experience. Meierhold's aim in this production was to emphasise the orgiastic character of the masses. He introduced stairs athwart the stage in order to obtain the effect of the Greek cothurna of figures raised to different heights. Whether by using these stairs parallel to the orchestra Meierhold was feeling his way towards an invasion of the auditorium is not clear. But the approach to the

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auditorium was pointed out by a critic, who said that if the stairs were carried into the auditorium the actor could then make his escape from the old stage movements, crowds, and so on. Meierhold, however, kept the stairs on the stage side of the footlights.

1908. **BREAK WITH KOMMISSARZHEVSKY.** Early in this year he broke with Kommissarzhevsky, with whom his relations had been strained for some time. The cause of a break was that Kommissarzhevsky complained that he was trying to turn the theatre into a laboratory. He simply passed from one experiment to another. She told him that by his latest experiments he had almost reduced the entertainment to a puppet show. She pointed out that the Press continually attacked their work for this reason, and had nearly succeeded in wrecking her theatre.

The rupture much impressed Meierhold, who at once set to work to summarise his thoughts in a very important article, "The History of the Technique of the Theatre," the theoretical basis of which were the views of Viatcheslav Ivanov. It was published in the "Tscheponnik."

**JAPANESE INFLUENCES.** He next went to Minsk to continue his experiments. Here he had much success with Wedekind's "The Vampire," "Balaganchik," "The Victory of Death," and "Electra," by Von Hoffmannsthal and Strauss. "The Vampire" was played without decoration. The music of the moods of the play was given by the Japanese method of music translated by bright-coloured spots. "Balaganchik" was played in the orchestra, and the author was introduced into the action. Decoration was replaced by screens. There was also the innovation of the illuminated auditorium. Full light was turned on the spectators, because Meierhold believed that it heightened the mood of the spectator, while enabling the actor to see, as in a looking-glass, the effect which he was communicating. The production also had a new conclusion. "Electra" and "The Victory of Death" were

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distinguished by the search for line and the absence of colour

1908. REFORM OF OPERA. PRACTICABLES. He was next invited to produce plays at the two imperial theatres at Petrograd, the Alexandrinsky and the Marinsky. It is a little difficult to understand why a producer of Meierhold's decidedly anarchistic tendencies consented to accept a position at academic theatres when he would be expected to make his work appeal to large and popular audiences. Apparently, however, he was not expected to sacrifice much, if anything. He produced and acted in the drama and the opera, and continued to use the same methods as when associated with Madam Kommissarzhevsky. They were the methods of the Conditional theatre. His first business was the reform of the opera. He sought a foundation of movement in the dance, and to unite the methods of the singer with those of the mime. He appears to have become increasingly conscious of the importance of the actor, and the necessity of making him highly expressive by detaching him from his old surroundings and giving a meaning to every movement of his body, limbs and features, and every intonation and inflexion of his voice. He was now clearly of the opinion that in the scheme of the theatre the actor comes first, and everything springs from the actor. As the actor's expression demands to be seen as well as felt, the actor himself must be clearly seen—seen in the round, not in the flat. The principles of "practicables" and of levels must, therefore, be applied. By "practicables," a term used in the Russian theatre, is meant the lines, the contours of the body and limbs. These must be sharply emphasised and as clearly defined as in Greek sculpture. Perhaps the emphasis on "Practicables" was the starting-point of bio-mechanics and the introduction of athletic drill to the stage, to which reference will be made presently. As to levels, Meierhold decided that the floor of the stage must be broken up and rearranged in combinations of levels at different heights. Such were the new tasks of the

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opera producer. One of his earliest productions was Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde," to which he gave the thirteenth century manner. The scenery was dictated by the mime.

1910. SPECTACLE. He went to Greece, where he came into contact with the ancient world. The effect of this was seen in his production of Molière's "Don Juan" at the Alexandrinsky theatre after his return. His aim was to absorb the spectator. So he gave the production the style of the stage, not of Molière. He made it a brilliant spectacle, gave it the air of Sicily rather than Versailles, and employed all his "tricks" to unite the actor with the spectator. He brought the former on to the apron stage where not one inch of him could be lost sight of by the spectator. He removed the proscenium and curtain. He flooded the auditorium with light. To his own "tricks" he added some of those of the age of King Sun (Louis XIV) of Golden Versailles. He flooded the actors with light as though carving them with a chisel. He set the scene alive with little black boys whose activities, perhaps more than anything else, added the necessary touch of the affected air of Molière's Versailles.

1910. MASKS AND PANTOMIME. During the same year he produced Schnitzler's "The Scarf of Columbine," at the House of Intermediary. This piece, like "Don Juan," was played in masks, and the acting was likewise brought to the proscenium, where everything logically followed, for instance, bright lights on the actors, etc. It is important to note the increasing use of masks, a convention, by the way, contributed by ancient Greece. A development of this abstract feature has taken place in the Russian theatre. To-day masks are built on the actor's face in a manner that will be described later. This method of schematizing and fixing a visual expression is followed in several theatres, notably the Jewish ones. The mask of Pierrot, in "The Scarf of Columbine," was designed by Sapunoff. This was Meierhold's first experiment in pantomime.

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and a move in the direction of clearing the stage of literary influences which became more decided as time went on. A further development took place in the production of Gluck's "Orpheus," in which a double plane stage was used, and the proscenium was "decorated" with a carpet. The positions of the groups and their movements were determined by the principle of "practicables."

November, 1910. **COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE.** Meierhold next produced one harlequinade, which revealed the beginning of scenery on the basis of the traditional scenery of the *Commedia dell'Arte*.

While this work was going on, Meierhold was seen in his favourite position with his back to the wall fighting the critics. He wrote an article explaining that the "Scarf of Columbine" was his first work in pantomime. In November, 1912, he published a book on the theatre. It was an apology for his sins, for going back to the beginning of the old theatre, to masks, gestures, eccentric movements, intrigues and the rest of the ancient business. But, of course, he was not in the least contrite. At this time he produced "The Ransom of Life," at the Alexandrinsky theatre, which set the critics discussing whether the Bastille was or was not taken in a theatrical way. "Electra," at the Marinsky, set them arguing about the disharmony between modern text and music and the old-time method of production. After this Meierhold paid a visit to Paris, where at the Chatelet theatre he produced D'Annunzio's "Pisanelle," with "decorations" by Bakst.

Winter, 1912-13. **A STUDIO OF IMPROVISATION.**

On his return he plunged into the organisation of a Studio, designed to teach the principles of the movement and scenery technique of Italian improvised comedy, which was the creation by Italian comedians penetrated by the spirit of their times.

1914. **CONSTRUCTION.** In this year there were two notable things. Meierhold began the *Journal of Doctor*

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Dapertutto, which he dedicated to the theatre. And he produced Blok's "The Unknown," using "construction" for the first time instead of "decoration." The principles of "construction" are now being applied by all the branches of the new Russian theatre. They are described elsewhere. In "The Unknown," eccentric accessories, jugglers, Chinese boys throwing oranges among the audience, quaint things and human figures were interwoven in a fantastic manner.

1915. THE CINEMA. During the first year of the war Meierhold turned his attention to the Cinema, with the object of reforming that instrument of expression also. He produced Oscar Wilde's "Dorian Gray," and took the part of Lord Henry. He then produced Ostrovsky's "Storm," in "decorations" by Golovin. His aim in this production was to remove the atmosphere of the first production of the play in December, 1859, and to substitute the mystic romantic element which resides in the plays by Ostrovsky. In the summer of 1916 he was again producing for the Cinema, and revealed his restless spirit in a novel handling of Pshibushevsky's "The Strong Man."

1918. COMMUNISM. The story of his subsequent career is the story of his conversion to communism and the new industrial civilisation, and his search for a theatrical form capable of efficiently communicating their spirit and message. That is to say, he was now pre-occupied with the communist matter and manner. His first adventure, so to speak, was the organisation of the Petrograd TEO Narkomprosa (People's Commissariat of Education), in conjunction with Mrs. Kameneff.

1919. He went to the Crimea to recuperate. Then to Novorussik, where he was imprisoned by the White Army. On his release he joined the Red Army. Later, the same year, he was appointed director of the TEO theatre



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1921. BIO-MECHANICS. He established a studio of bio-mechanics.

1923. He celebrated with communist honours his twenty-fifth year of "revolutionary" work in the Russian theatre.

In tracing the extraordinary career of this modern Prometheus, who ever seeks to steal the sacred fire of dramatic communication from heaven and to convey its secrets to his fellow-men, I have been careful to point out the many and varied forms reached by him and the significance of their underlying principles. The reason is that some at least of these forms and the principles actuating them compose influences which are operating strongly upon the Left theatre, and through this theatre upon the Centre and Right ones. It is necessary to understand these forms and principles if we wish to understand the new theatrical system which they are being used to construct. To understand them we must know their origins, for which purpose we must turn to Meierhold and his past and present ideas, ideals and achievements.

As a matter of fact, most of the new influences operating on the new theatre proceed from Meierhold. His life's work represents that mainstream of technical development in the modern Russian theatre which is now supplying important tributaries. This can be better realised when his new conception of the form of theatre, the technique of the actor and of the scene, his new forms of dramatic communication, and his application of their principles to the new theatre and its new plays are considered.

Meierhold's post-revolution development has been of the same religious character (using the term in the sense of faith) as his pre-revolution one. He has always been strongly actuated by a deep religious faith in the theatre. This faith has shaped his thought and guided his action. It has formed the key with which he sought to unlock what might be termed the universal mystery of dramatic communication. To him as to the ancient Greeks the theatre has appeared a temple, with the stage as the Holy of Holies and the Actor as the High Priest serving as a medium of religious initiation into the truth of dramatically communicated mysteries. Meierhold now adds to

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the old faith a new one. He still regards the theatre as a temple, the Actor as the High Priest and a highly sensitised instrument of communication, and he still believes that spirit or the activity behind things is the element to be communicated, and the "style" of a play is to be sought and reproduced. But it is no longer the spirit proceeding from individualistic sources, but that proceeding from a new collective world order. Not the spirit of Maeterlinck, let us say, but the spirit of Marx. It is the spirit of the faith and standards and new values of modern communism. Meierhold now exalts Marx where Maeterlinck used to be. In other words, the Revolution has given him a new conception, not of the function of the theatre, but of the material from which the dramatic essence is to be extracted, and of the form necessary to communicate this essence. It has changed the interior of his theatre from the likeness of a Catholic Church to that of a Positivist one. It has removed all the æsthetic trappings, colour, incense and the rest of the powerful intoxicants, and left nothing but a bare pulpit and a preacher and the portraits and texts of the new leaders.

According to his new conception the theatre is now a social temple, with characteristics resembling the great open-air mass theatre of the early Greeks. He contends that the theatre cannot continue to play its pre-war part. It cannot be a sacrificial altar for the sole use of anarcho-individualists, It is now in the same position as the social political institutions whose business it is to construct the new life of Soviet Russia. In order to construct it they must unite the different sections of the Russian people—workers, peasants, soldiers and students. They must enlighten the worker and peasant, promote collective thought and action, educate them in the laws and principles of the new life, gain their confidence, strengthen their faith in communism, and increase their knowledge and use of its technical processes. As a social institution the theatre must do likewise. It must initiate the workers into the truth of communism through dramatic communication.

Hence, the position of the actor changes. He is no longer a wage-earning slave, a living lie, a clown as in the contemporary theatre. He is a citizen and a social politician. As the mirror reflects the form of the sun so the actor must reflect the social

## MEIERHOLD'S THEATRE

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political life. He cannot construct apart from this. This means that he must have an intellectual as well as a physical training. He must be brain and body disciplined. He must have the social political view, and understand his place in the class struggle.

As to the spectator, he must not be passive. The function of the theatre is to rouse him to action, to bring out the social politician in him by dramatically communicating to him the social political spirit.

This is a statement of Meierhold's new faith as expressed by him. How does it appear in his theatre? As one might expect, it shows itself mainly in a continuation of the everlasting search for new forms. But the paths are now industrial and biological sciences. The latest form rests on two ideas, construction and bio-mechanics, in which Meierhold's present-day "theatricality" is bound up, and which are rapidly shaping the new theatre. What is this new thing—construction—which is actuating and inspiring the new men, actors, producers, poets, painters, sculptors, writers and, indeed, all in the different departments of Russian thought and activity?

CONSTRUCTION—building—utility—the Machine—the new conception of the Machine—as a moral and constructive factor—the worker as a master of the machine, reproducing its sounds and movements which to him are a second nature—the working out of a constructive background subordinated to him, scenery as a material aid—such is the logical association of ideas. Construction is building as an engineer builds according to conscious mathematical principles. It is, therefore, to some extent a mechanical process, like bridge building. But it can also be creative. It embodies a movement belonging to our times, and it bears the spirit of what is most characteristic of our times—industry, machinery, science, etc. Iron, glass, concrete, triangles, circles, squares, cylinders, are put together according to their constructive meaning with mathematical exactitude and with the logic demanded by the substance of the materials. It seeks severity, clearness, simplicity, and serves to give impetus to a powerful vital life. It rests on almost excessive simplification, condensation and

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conservation, thus taking part in the reaction against the increased complication and wastefulness of present-day forms of life. Hence, it is opposed to composition and the æsthetic that belongs to it. Constructionists say that composition and its æsthetic look back and, therefore, belong to the past. It stands apart from life and is, therefore, devitalised. It is wedded to excessive ornament, decoration, prettiness. It does not stop at the simple schematic representation of a design, but puts on unjustifiable accretion. Simply the meaning of this is, that construction not composition is now the catchword in Russia. The æstheticist, painter, sculptor, poet or any other is dead; the constructionist takes his place. Beauty is dead; truth prevails. The worker-actor's task is to provide a social design to be filled in by all. So much for construction, which will be dealt with further in the following chapters.

BIO-MECHANICS is really the application of the construction or mechanical theory to the actor. It assumes that the actor is a rather wonderful engine composed of many engines. The new problem of the theatre is how to get this engine in full motion, with all its parts—muscles, sinews, tendons, representing flexible piston rods, cylinders, etc.—working at their full capacity and, moreover, conveying their proper meaning according to the message sent by the brain along the spinal cord and great system of nerves. The principles of bio-mechanics were first applied by Meierhold in his Studio theatre. The system to which they belong is the outcome of a study of the Italian comedians of the Commedia dell'arte period. They became systematically applied by him in the R.S.F.S.R. theatre in Petrograd from 1918 to 1922.

The laws of bio-mechanic are founded on the study of the physiological construction of man. The system aims to produce men who understand the mechanism and laws of their structure and can, therefore, use it perfectly. It has established a principle of analysis by which each movement of the body can be differentiated and made fully expressive. Bio-mechanics replaces the emotional theory of acting which assumes an ignorance of the mechanics of the human body, by a form of education in the science of technics, which trains the intellect of the actor, and develops his body by means of sport,

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and so produces the organised actor in full possession of the keyboard of his mind and body, and capable of adding dignity to his calling. In short, the aim of those who apply bio-mechanics in the theatre is to put the actor in control of his movements, instead of leaving the movements in control of the actor, as might be said to be the case at the Moscow Art theatre, where the controlling brain is not the actor's but the director's. Bio-mechanics has a social purpose. Its principles are being applied to the physical organisation of the workers, to whom the actor, especially in the circus, where precision, dexterity, steel nerves, courage, daring, judgment, engineering exactitude, and long rigid training are necessary, becomes a demonstration of the ideal organised human body and its mechanism. Meierhold was the first to apply construction and bio-mechanics. Probably his early legal and logical training had something to do with both. While developing these ideas Meierhold continued to place the actor first as the principal means of dramatic communication. But his conception of the actor as a social machine involved the working out of a new background subordinated to him. The background was further dictated by his interpretation of society and constructive scenery. He had the mass and co-operative idea of society. He regarded society as a great industrial machine, of which each individual is a functional part. Each is free inasmuch as he understands himself and the whole, just as a bird is free to the extent that it realises its captivity. Probably Meierhold derived the machine idea not from Marxism but from Marinettism, with its modernolatry the idealisation and worship of the Machine, its movements and sounds and the attempt to express them in forms of art. Constructivism was also influenced by futurism. By constructive scenery Meierhold understands essential scenery adapted to the realisation of man's free acting in space, and not photography or decoration. Instead of painted planes he uses constructions in volumes made of wood, iron and other suitable material. In order to obtain style he gives the scenery certain machine-like qualities. His object now is to extract and communicate the machine spirit or to promote machinolatory, to use a term more in harmony with his conception of the theatre as a temple. Briefly, he sees society as a moral machine; he sees the actor as an essential

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part of the Machine, with movements to correspond; he sees the background as an essential part of the actor; he sees the thing to be extracted and communicated by both as the machine spirit. Hence, a new form of environment, representing a structure of industrial and craft organisation.

Since the Revolution Meierhold has directed several nationalised theatres. To-day he is principally concerned with the Zon theatre, now called Meierhold's theatre, and the theatre of Revolutionary Satire.

The Zon theatre is one of the biggest theatres in Moscow. It was once a very fashionable and indecent cafe-chantant. About three years ago it was handed over to Meierhold for the production of revolutionary plays. Subsequently it underwent certain changes according to his experiments. The first production was in 1920, in celebration of the Revolution. The piece selected was Verhaeren's "Les Aubes," which Meierhold handled much as he liked. On this occasion he used an act-drop made especially for the play and containing a big futurist design. The scenery was simple, essential and constructive, but it was an early form of construction, not the new and mature one. Rudimentary structures were put upon the stage expressing the different elements of urban life. The play itself underwent certain changes, but not extreme ones. Still they were sufficient to lead the critics to say that Meierhold was communicating himself and not Verhaeren. Construction as it is now understood as an aid to acting and nothing more, and demanding that everything on the stage must be designed to help the actor, arrived in April, 1922, in a play by Crommelinck, "The Magnificent Cuckold." The scenery, of which every part was essential to the action of the play, was designed by one of the students of the theatre school, whose design was corrected by a professor-instructor of the school. The character of the scenery is described by one of the structures, that representing a prison. Instead of a conventional prison of four stone walls and a window and a bench, one saw a threefold wooden structure, oblong, circular and square. All three parts were of wood, the two latter forming open cages. Resting against the oblong part was a ladder by which the prisoner entered the first structure, passed to the second, the circular; thence to the third, the square

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A development of the constructional scenery appeared in the next production, that of Soukhovo-Kobylin's "The Death of Tarelkin." In this production adaptable and schematic structures were used. The piece, which was set in the middle of the last century, was a satire on the Russian police of the Tsarist regime. The "scenery" consisted of three or four adaptable structures. There was, for instance, in one act a bier showing the scheme of the corpse which rested upon it. In the last act this bier formed a table.

Let me now come to two productions which show developments in other directions and are "revolutionary" landmarks. I refer to Vladimir Maiakovsky's "Mysteria-Bouffes," and "Zemla Dybom" (the Earth Prancing). Maiakovsky is an anarchist writer who "arrived" before the war. At that time he was engaged vigorously creating new forms and as vigorously destroying old ones. <sup>1</sup> "He used prose rhythms, broke up the customary metres formed by Poushkin, complicated rhyme, introduced assonances and dissonances, and unearthed new images." Thus he elbowed his way through "those who stood in front," and appeared before the flabbergasted public in his yellow jacket, with new poems and new methods of reciting. When the Revolution came Maiakovsky accepted it with enthusiasm. His bitter, pitiless railing at the rotting bourgeois intelligentsia came to an end. He proclaimed "a leap into the future," and with an increased energy began to pull down and demolish old forms, old literature. Untiringly he designed propaganda posters, and covered the whole of Russia with them. As in verse, Maiakovsky began here a revolution which has ended in victory.

"For a time only the theatre remained untouched. But Maiakovsky could not long tolerate such an immunity. He wrote 'Mysteria-Bouffes' by a superhuman effort secured its production on the stage, and carried out a theatrical revolution, the full importance of which only the future will be able to appraise. Working in co-operation with the well-known producer, Meierhold, he tore away the curtain, exposed to the audience the sanctum of the theatre—the stage behind the wings—allowing them to see how scenery is shifted and changed; did away with the pedantry of the Moscow Art

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theatre, by permitting the audience to come and leave at any time they liked, or to respond to the acting with any interjections, expressions of approval or disapproval that they might think fit; and changed the old methods of acting, the forms of scenery, and the relation between the actors and the stage to such an extent that there was hardly anything of the old system left.

"There can be no question about the effectiveness of the blow which has been dealt by Maiakovsky at the routine, methods, and ideas of the old theatre. It will not matter very much even if nothing of Maiakovsky is retained in the theatre of the future. There may be very little of him left in the poetry of the future, too. But he never came to create, he came to destroy. With the mighty sweeps of his gigantic broom he has cleared the way for the art that is yet to come."

"*Mysteria-Bouffes*" was the second production at the Zon, and marked a transitional stage from "*Les Aubes*" to "*The Magnificent Cuckold*." It revealed Meierhold feeling his way towards the great Mass theatre and co-operation on the widest scale. It was produced on the 1st May, Russia's great festival day, before many members of the Government. The objects of the production were: (1) to stage the victory of the social revolution over the world which came to an end in 1917, in the form of a heroic and satirical picture; (2) to turn the whole theatre into a stage, placing the latter as far as possible in the centre of the public; and (3) to persuade the public to take part in the performance. Accordingly, Meierhold removed all the stage accretions, leaving only the bare walls and floor. He removed the fronts of the boxes on either side of the auditorium, thus leaving two free passages running from and on a level with the stage, round the auditorium. And he further connected the stage, at the centre, with the auditorium by means of a platform wide enough to take two motor side-cars abreast. In the centre of the stage he placed an open structure which remained throughout, and which represented first the Ark, then Paradise. In front was a globe representing the world. In the last act he placed actors in the boxes whence the fronts had been removed. These represented different objects of production and exchange. Each "object" had to deliver a speech. Each spoke in turn to the spectators, telling them that they (the objects) no longer belonged to the rich exploiters but to the



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workers. This method of personifying inanimate things recalls Capek's "Insect" play, and Rostand's "Chanticleer," in which birds mostly do the talking.

The action of the play passes at the North Pole, in Hell and in Paradise. At the opening there has been a deluge (the Revolution), the world has been swept away and only the North Pole remains. To this come fourteen persons—seven Clean (Proletarians) and seven Unclean (Bourgeoisie). They agree to build an Ark for safety; but no sooner is it finished than the Unclean scheme to assume power. There are certain political doings: a King is drowned, a National Assembly is elected and dispersed, after which the Clean, despairing of obtaining justice except from themselves, set out in search of Paradise (the Proletarian one). On the way, like Christian, they pass through Hell (or something like it), and then reach Heaven. It does not please them. After ejecting its inhabitants, on the ground that they are misfits, they resume their search for a Paradise of their own. Finally they reach the Machine World of their aspiration, where they begin the repairs of transport, etc., necessary to put Russia on its feet, or so one is led to interpret their plunge into mechanical industry. The play ended with a sort of glorified apotheosis of labour, in which one saw the dream of the tillers of the soil, artisans and mechanics, of a mechanised and electrified Russia come true. The play was an instance of the new machinolatory working through the poet and the producer.

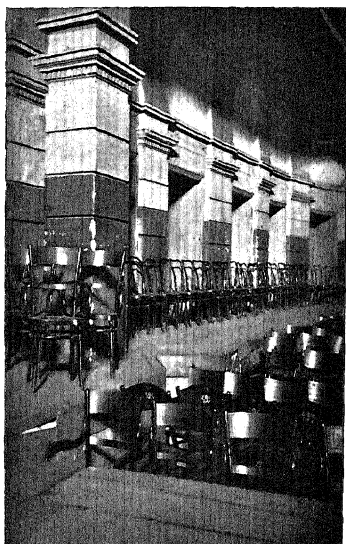
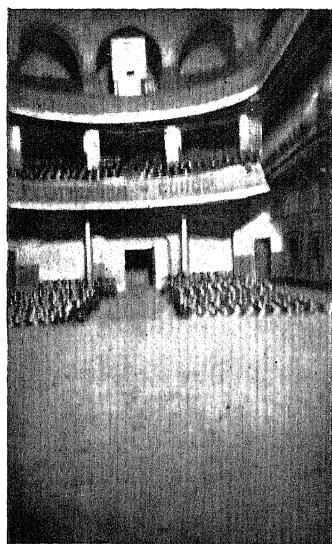
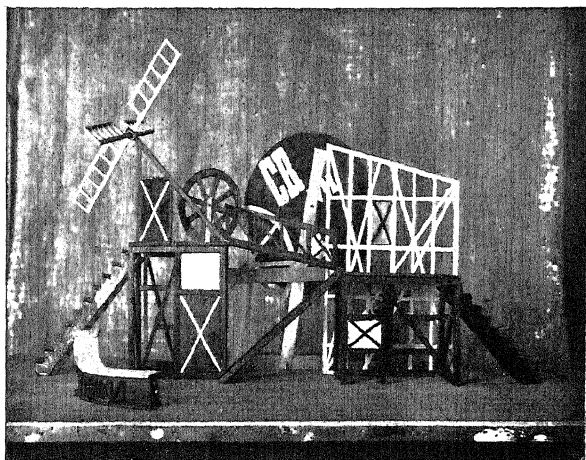
The success of the piece varied with the theatre in which it was played. At the Zon it was fairly successful, but when tried at the Circus it failed to please because the spectators, who were accustomed to circus "turns" and business, failed to appreciate the satirical spirit of "Mysteria-Bouffes." Its greatest success came when played in the open-air as a spectacle, in which thousands of people took part. The comparative failure of the piece in the roofed-in theatre seems to prove that the conventional form of theatre is no use for the new species of play which authors and producers with communist sympathies are inventing or extracting from the script of old plays, for the collective audience. This play, both in conception and substance, is entirely different from anything written for the conventional stage.

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Probably the most extraordinary production, and one that gave highest satisfaction to the communists was "Zemla Dybom," played at the Zon theatre. It was an excellent instance of Meierhold's unabated search for new form, his amazing efforts to abolish conventional memories, and his latest determination to do as he likes with the script of a play. Moreover, it was his first agitational production. The piece was adapted by Gorodetsky from Martini's "Night," and was dedicated to the Red Army and its leader, Trotsky. The story deals with a revolution in the army similar to that which took place in Kerensky's time. The army revolts, and a provisional government is set up of a socialist character. But a counter-revolution is carried on by communists. The leading communist is shot dead. His death is used to glorify communism. The body is stolen from its captors by the friends of the dead man, who later return with it in a red coffin. The glorification is reached by the coffin containing the red leader being placed on a central height in full view of the spectator. Its blood-red colour is picked out by a spot light, and to strengthen the effect the black figure of a weeping woman is partly thrown across it. The peasants in the play who were at first opposed to communism and class war are now converted to it. The change is effected by an elderly peasant who is the mother of the dead man. The new thing in the production was the agitational spirit which Meierhold sought to communicate. In order to do so he tried to give the production the form of an agitational poster. Or to put it another way, he abandoned his habit of making a theatre production in order to make a poster production. Thus the whole thing—play, acting and scenery—was designed for agitational purposes, just as posters by Maiakovsky and others were designed and stuck all over Russia for the same purpose. Indeed Meierhold got the idea from an early period of the Revolution when posters were used as a fighting weapon. As far as I could follow this innovation, the leading characters were only schematic, like poster outlines. Their passions were party watchwords scattered about the poster at various angles and levels. The "scenery" and accessories were things made absolutely necessary by the requirements of the Revolution.

I sat studying the single structure on the stage for quite an



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1. General view of the machinery for *The Magnificent Cuckold*. Another instance of Meierhold's preoccupation with the machine factory world. The scene is symbolic of the liberating of the mechanic to a mastery of the machine and tools. It also expresses the new technical ideas of construction and concentration. 2 and 3. The theatre adapted to the new ideas. 2. View from the stage, showing connecting path, propaganda inscription and cinema projector. 3. The front of the boxes is removed for mixing the audience with the creation.



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hour before the curtain (an imaginary one) rose. The play was billed to begin at 8 o'clock; but with that astonishing unpunctuality which is a marked characteristic of the present-day theatres in Russia, it began at nine. All I saw was a black space formed by a bare stage, with its uncovered walls and stationary open structure, behind which figures in workers' costumes continually passed. I was told they were the actors arriving. The structure was schematic. It looked like the outline of a section of a cantilever bridge flanked by two towers. It had three platforms—one at the top, one centre, and one on the level of the stage. There were two movable pieces of scenery, a threshing machine used symbolically in the peasant scenes, and a tall rostrum which was wheeled on and was supposed to change the scene to the trenches. Disaffected soldiers mounted the rostrum and addressed their comrades down below, it might be in a dug out. There was no decoration. The constructive lines were very simple, much simpler than in "Rogonosets." The accessories were typewriting machines, field telephones, and guns. Just above the centre of the stationary structure was a screen upon which was flashed party watchwords calculated to counteract reactionary scenes and sentiments as they appeared. A little to the left was a large poster bearing words by Chicherin: "Build, Build, Design, Learn. Build up the Revolutionary Front." The performance served to stimulate the revolutionary spirit, and to cast utmost ridicule on the old ruling-class and the socialists, especially those belonging to Kerensky's administration. There was a good deal of clowning and vulgarity. A drunken king was brought on in a sack, and pitched out at the feet of his kowtowing favourites. Drunken officers were introduced whose brutal and indecent behaviour was sickening. One went through the business of relieving himself in full view of the audience, after which he was attended to by some nurses and put to bed, while his subordinates went about holding their noses. On the other hand, there was much to impress the spectator, as when the soldiers came marching through the auditorium singing, shouting, shooting, and the spectators rose in a body to join them.

From the outset Meierhold recognised that the piece was too big for the roofed-in theatre, where only a part of the action

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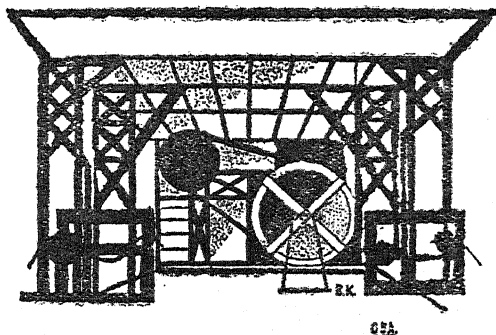
could be realised. He wished to produce it in the Kodinsky field on the outskirts of Moscow, a military ground, where there was room for soldiers and automobiles, and where he could stage-manage a big spectacular affair in which everyone could take part and assist the soldiers to go through their fighting according to the style of the play.

It seems that this species of play requires of the leading actors a special training. The methods are as follows:—The words must be spoken by placing the accent on the vowels, not on the consonants. This draws attention to the phonetic expression and produces atmosphere. It has the further effect of separating the speech from declamation and the singing method used at some of the advanced academic theatres, for instance, the Moscow Kamerny. The result obtained is called semaphore speech. This means a form of speech which flashes out phrases like poster phrases, giving them a finished rhythmic appearance of their own. The method of delivering the text is determined by the agitational effect which the actor must think of first of all. Just as an experienced political speaker carefully weighs those sentences which he wishes most to influence his audience. Gesture rests on a similar principle. It articulates the sound, just as sound articulates the meaning, and the arm-gesture has the same quality as the word-gesture, if such a term is permissible. Such is the basis of an elaborate method which needs very arduous study. It should be said that the application of the new methods which are being discovered by progressive producers like Meierhold, is rendered very difficult by the habit of a large number of young actors of imitating the Moscow Art theatre and Kamerny theatre methods. Meierhold is anxious to teach the new worker-actor to speak, not to converse or to declaim or to chant. It might be added that the members of his theatres and Studio theatre are workers and students. They receive very little pay, and are, therefore, compelled to do other work besides acting to earn bread and butter. Each theatre has a soviet composed of representatives of the different departments, whose business it is to attend to administrative details, play selections, and so on.

Before leaving Meierhold and his theatre a word should be said concerning his other productions. An examination of his post-revolution programme shows that he has kept unswervingly

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to the revolutionary propaganda species of play. Ernst Toller, the German revolutionist, is at the head of the list of authors, both his "Machine Wreckers" and "Masses and Men" having had a considerable number of performances. "Machine Wreckers" is one of several plays written of late round the Machine and its influence, which reveals a tendency on the part of the young authors to revolt against the immorality of machinery and its devastating effect on human beings. It is concerned with the Luddite riots which followed the introduction of steam-driven machinery to England. Another is Georg Kaiser's "Gas," a terrible picture of disaster wrought by the explosion of a great Gas Works which supplies the social world with power. This was produced at Petrograd. A third example of the Machine motive in plays is found in



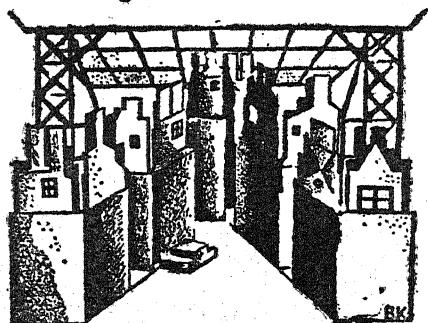
Revolutionary Theatre. Toller's *Machine Wreckers*. This scene demonstrates how machine-like scenery serves for "machine" plays.

Capek's "R.U.R.," with its machine-like human beings. "R.U.R." has not found its way to Soviet Russia as yet. These writers are evidently trying to destroy the Machine, as Ruskin would like it destroyed, because of the power it exercises through unscrupulous persons, and because it hardens and brutalises all of us. But there is another side to the Machine. It is a moral side, by which the Machine, if properly understood, transfers its power and qualities to those that use it, even magnifies their importance and exalts them.

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This is how the new Russian administrators look at the Machine. In it and through it they see the realisation of the Russian workers' great natural gifts, hopes and aspirations. It sounds like a paradox. The subject recurs in the next chapter.



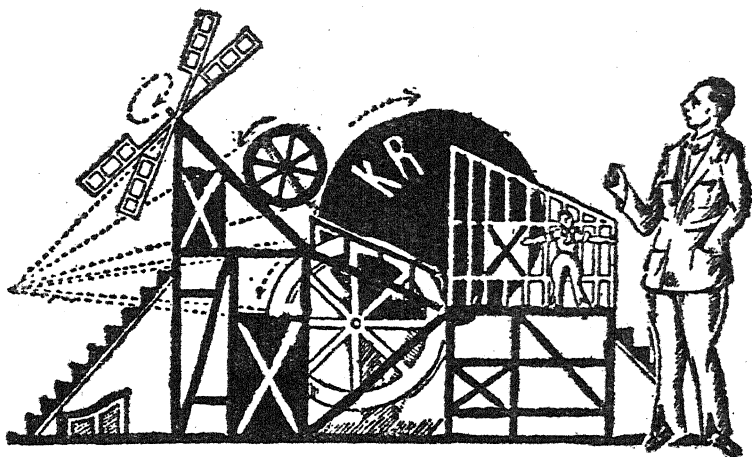
Toller's *Machine Wreckers*. "The Workers Quarter"  
showing how Industry remodels the scene.





Above:—A group of workers' representatives of the Moscow Proletcult Theatre Studio. They are the most important executive personalities. Below:—A group of directors of the Proletcult workshops. They are worker personalities, painters, sculptors, poets, authors, architects, etc.





Meierhold and a synthesis of his Scenery, showing the new machine and factory forms used in the new representation.

## CHAPTER VII

### *THE LEFT GROUP (Continued)*

#### (ii) THE PROLET CULT THEATRE

**I**N the preceding chapter I have considered the section of the Left Group theatre under the direction of the old anarchist intelligentsia. There are three small organisations belonging to this section which are dealt with in the concluding chapter of the "Left Group." I next come to the section of the Left Group theatre under the direction of the workers themselves, who seek self-expression and are excluding professionalism in favour of voluntarism. At the head of this division is the Proletcult theatre. This theatre is second in importance to the Meierhold theatre, from which is

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derives a great deal. As its name implies, it belongs to the proletarian culture movement which sprang up after the Revolution. This movement was designed to promote culture among the workers, and to encourage gifted young men and women from the common people, largely factory workers, to express themselves freely in art, drama, poetry, literature, etc. It was the culture of a class striving for self-explanation and self-publication. The founders rightly assumed that the Russian people are naturally gifted, and the common people have a rich store of natural abilities and apparently inexhaustible physical health.

At the head of the Moscow organisation is V. F. Pletnev, a gifted workingman author and organiser. He has written plays and essays, and has closely concerned himself with the cultural problems of a class to which he belongs who struggle to free themselves from the tyranny of the monied classes, and seeks to make institutions, including a theatre, for their own use.

The Proletcult theatre was then conceived of as a theatre for the special use of the working-class and for promoting working-class culture. It was organised by representatives of the workers, to be controlled and directed by workers, and to admit certain instructors drawn from the old anarchist intelligentsia and the Right theatre. Its methods were designed to superimpose the modern industrial "will" upon the traditional "will" of the theatre, and thus to make the theatre, as far as possible, a party instrument and a State and a national one; to make the workers understand that their destiny was in their own hands, and they must no longer support the ruling and subjecting of their own lives by others; and to develop them as citizens and defenders of their country. According to the latter purpose acting was based on a system of physical drill, and at one time the Proletcult theatre was largely a recruiting ground for the army. This attempt to drill the workers through the theatre into "cannon fodder" and to use the drilled for every passing war whim of the military governors has died down. Physical drill still forms the basis of the method of acting followed by the workers, because it is necessary to the expression of the spirit of a vital life.

Viewed historically, the Proletcult theatrical movement started in 1918, as a part of a general working-class cultural

## THE PROLET CULT THEATRE

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movement. It attracted the support of many able thinkers and workers, theorists and practitioners, who ever since have continued to speak and write on the ideas, ideals and methods to be pursued. Moreover, they have urged on every possible occasion that the utmost encouragement should be given, and every facility offered to the workers to express themselves, whether in literature, art, drama, or any other high form. The columns of the Press were to be thrown open to them, publication made easy, and paths of communication of all sorts opened up. They recognised the urgent need of self-expression and self-publication by the working-class. We have only to turn to the 'Proletcult Bulletins published since 1917 to see the amount of time, trouble and thought expended in this endeavour to express and propagate proletarian cultural ideas. Among the many theorists one notes A. Lunacharsky, with his workers' æsthetic; P. Kergentseff, with his encouraging ideas on the self-expression of the working-class in new forms of theatre and plays, and emphasis on the importance of the Socialist Mass theatre and plays; and V. Smyschlaiev, with his carefully elaborated system for training the worker-actor. The object before all three writers was the common one of the workers themselves in building their theatre. They saw (1) that the workers were conscious of a new life; (2) that a new culture was needed; (3) that new conditions of life were likely to determine its form; and (4) that a new social synthesis must, inevitably follow.

Evidently all this was borne in mind by Lunacharsky when he wrote his essay on <sup>2</sup> "The Beginning of a Proletarian Æsthetic." He was aware that a new working-class æsthetic was coming. He had learnt that there were different kinds of æsthetic suited to different historical periods and to different classes, according to their economic structure. By æsthetic he doubtless means style. Each age has its style. To-day it is perfectly clear that Russia is rapidly developing a proletarian style. But let us keep to Lunacharsky's term, "æsthetic." He is of the opinion that the bourgeois and proletarian æsthetics overlap and cannot very well be separated. By the

<sup>1</sup> "Proletarskaja Kultura," "Proletarskaja Bulletin," "Gorn" (The Forge), etc.

<sup>2</sup> "Proletarskaja Kultura," No. 11-12.

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bourgeois æsthetic he means the æsthetic of (a) the rich merchant and his class; (b) the old aristocracy; and (c) the individualistic intelligentsia and the little bourgeoisie. By the proletarian æsthetic he understands something that has not yet had time to take definite form. But he thinks it will be the art and craft, "style" or "spirit," of the new mechanistic thought and action—machinulatory, as I have termed it. The culture of the worker must go on the occupational lines of the worker.

In this way he sees the proletarian unavoidably falling under the influence and expressing himself in some degree after the manner of these four groups. For instance, the bourgeois engineering imperialism in the work of Kellerman, who wrote some verse in honour of the Machine and Big Industry, finds a reflection in the proletarian verse praising machinery and industry. The difference is that whereas the capitalist and his circle of writers see the Machine as a machine contributing to the profit, vanity and aggrandizement of the monied class, and are unable to see it as a great aid to humanity, an instrument of construction in the world of justice and liberty, the proletariat have come to regard it as a moral and æsthetic factor in the struggle for freedom. In his pre-occupation with the Machine the proletarian is nearer to the Big Business bourgeoisie than to the aristocracy or little bourgeoisie.

Lunacharsky also sees a relation between the proletariat and the anarcho-romantic intelligentsia during revolutionary periods and periods of reaction. In the first period he finds the intelligentsia poets and painters protesting in groups against the brutal actualities, and calling on the insurrectionists to take action. In the second period they are quick to realise the horrors of the Revolution for which they clamoured and the first to flee from them. This actually occurred during the Russian Revolution. Representatives of the old intelligentsia called for a revolution, sang in its praise when it came, and fled like scared sheep when they saw the colour of its blood. Perhaps this behaviour is not surprising when it is considered that these particular representatives form a class that exists in their own little world of suffering, hysteria and idealism, isolated from humanity. On the other hand, the proletariat lives in a world containing the definite, vital elements of human existence.



Above:—A lorry-load of actors touring the Moscow factories, where they receive payment in kind, food, clothes, etc., for their services. Below:—A group of worker-actors.





## THE PROLET CULT THEATRE

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Simply, while the old intelligentsia are individualistic and wrapped up in themselves, the proletariat are collective and act and think through each other and the mass.

What is the proletarian æsthetic? It is an æsthetic of the Machine in which Lunacharsky sees reflected that moral side which he affirms in human beings. To the bourgeoisie the Machine is an instrument for exploiting the worker and for enriching themselves. To the proletariat it is the greatest instrument of future advance and happiness. Accordingly, they attribute to the Machine all their own social and moral attributes. In this new god they see their own vitality, strength, courage, cleanness, steel nerves, persistency, precision, language, rhythm, endurance, their love of science, moral justice and liberty; and finally, a justification for their belief in collective justice, collective creation, and collective life. Justice, creation, and life acquire the widest and deepest significance in the collective sense. Collectivism is a big thing. So is the Machine. Morally considered, is it not a symbol of Collectivist Society? And Collectivist Society is Society Unbound. With such ideas before them, is it any wonder that the workers have turned resolutely towards thought and action resting mainly on the morality and truth of the Machine?

P. Kergentseff's theories of a new theatre and form of drama are no less informative. He is all for voluntarism and spontaneity, for the great Mass theatre, for bringing the stage into the open, and for letting the workers interpret their own spirit in their own way.<sup>1</sup>

V. Smyschlaiev's proposed school for communistic actors embodies some of the ideas supported by Meierhold. He wants the actor to be a citizen, a communist, and a social politician. He must pass through the communist party school, take an active part in the work of the party organisation. He must undertake social work which unites him to the party. He must learn to be a part of the collective mass, both in the Theatre and out of it. So the Studio must prepare not only the new actor prepared to merge his personality in that of the spectator, but the communist. Remove this new thing in

<sup>1</sup> "The System of Work in the Workers' Studio Theatre." "Proletarskaja Kultura," No. 17-19.

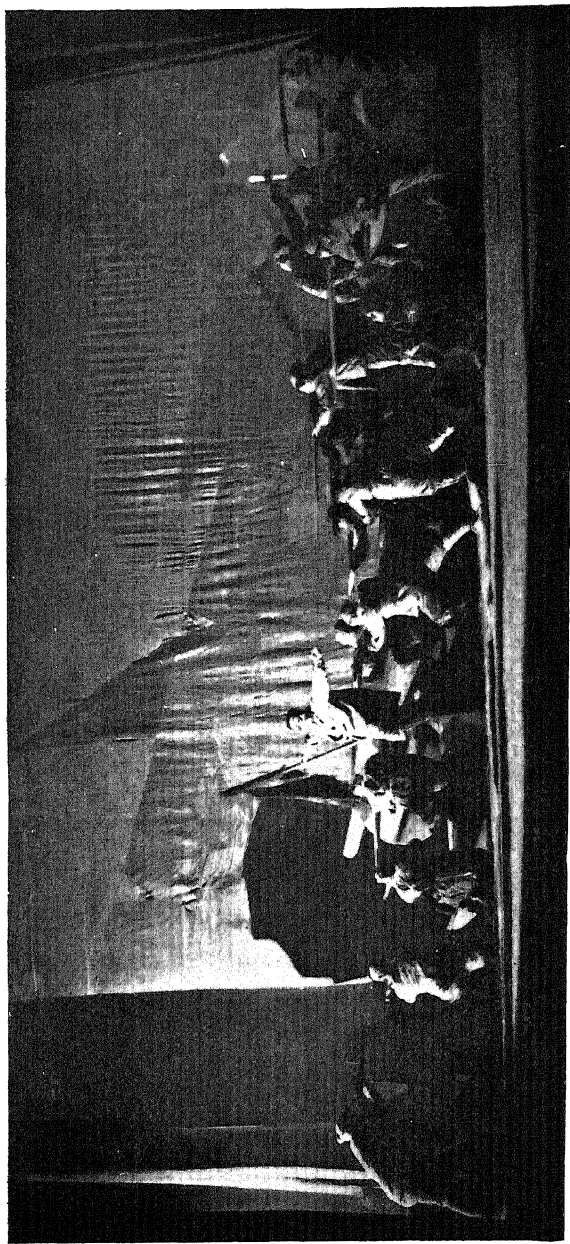
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actor-training, and Smyschlaiev's carefully-thought-out system may be applied to any theatre in Western Europe and America. Its five divisions, diction, voice, declamation, improvisation, æsthetic, are calculated to turn out the actor worthy of his "hire."

The Proletcult theatre developed with such aids as these, forming as it did so its own notable body of enthusiastic builders. Its theorists included Lunacharsky, Kergentseff, Tichonovisch, Smyschlaiev, Meierhold, Gan, and Arvatov. Its playwrights, Lunacharsky, Kergentseff, Pletnev, Maiakovsky, Reisner, Wermischev, and Kamiensky. Its producers, Smyschlaiev, Tichonovisch, Eisenstein, Meierhold, Foregger, Prosvietov, and Radlov. Its "decorators," Konchalovsky, Altmann, Chagal, Shtevchenko, Lentulov, Shterenberg, Kandinsky, Rodchenko, Pevchner, Jakoulov, and Fedorovsky; while sculptors of the ability of Konenkov, Rievdel, Lavinsky, and Tchaikov contributed valuable ideas. As for the proletarian and revolutionary plays, great and small, there is a very significant repertory in the making formed of such plays as "Mysteria-Bouffes," "Stenka Rasin," "Don Kichot" (Lunacharsky), "The Mexican," "Incredible," "Impossible," "The Avenger" (Pletnev), "Lena" (Pletnev), "God Asleep," "Strikes" (Pletnev), and many others.

An idea of the plays in circulation may be gathered from the following particulars of the general work of the Proletcult theatre and its studios. In 1920 the Proletcult became an established theatre, and the Studio was transferred to the 1st Workers' State Proletcult. In the new theatre were produced "The Mexican," by Jack London; "Lena," a story of the strike at the big works on the Lena, by V. Pletnev; "Fleto," an episode from the French Commune; "The Dawn of Proletcult," a piece composed of the work of different proletarian poets; and "Over the Top," a social comedy, by V. Pletnev; "Master," adapted from Gofman; and "The Red Star," an utopia, by Bagdanaf. In the summer-time the Studio goes to the Don Basin, the Ural mines, and Turkestan, to instruct workers and exhibit new plays. Provincial Studio companies occupy its theatre. Among them is the Studio of the Ribensk Proletcult, with the improvised play, "Do not Go," the Smolensk Proletcult with "Savve," and "King



THE PROLET CULT OR WORKERS' THEATRE: MOSCOW.

This theatre has undergone five distinct stages of development. The first stage was the workers taking possession of their new world. The second stage showed them putting the Revolution in the theatre. The above is *The Avengers*, by Renal, played by worker actors with crude and make-shift scenery.



## THE PROLET CULT THEATRE

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Arlekin," and Ivanovo-Voznesensky Proletcult with "The Master" and "Insurrection," by Verharn. The Provinces are active with many plays. Twer prepares "Bartel Touraser" and "The Tower," both by Gastev; Ekaterinburg, "It was so, but it will be so"; Igevsky Works, "Fleto" and the "Dream of the 1st May"; Ivanovo-Voznesensky, "The Enchanted Blacksmith" and "The Awakening," by the worker playwright, Gandurin; "The Shark," by Sinitzen, another worker playwright. In 1921 the Centro-Studios took a new direction with "Tonatno-plastique." They performed the tableau, "Labour," with chorus declamation. The Workers' theatre is busy with many other plays, including Georg Kaiser's "Gas," Sinclair's "King Coal," and "The Prince of Hagen," Gladnov's "Vataga," and "The Wise Man." In 1921 the producers' schools, laboratories, and studios were organised.

Anyone who studies the productions by the Proletcult theatre from the start in 1918 will find they mark definite stages of development. Thus, first of all, they fall into two main divisions. (a) The Period of Revolution, with the ideas it brought. (b) The Period of Transition, with its suffering and the sacrifices made by the Russian workers for their ideas, and the relief that came with the end of war, especially civil. The vast forces at work during the two periods gripped, absorbed, and actuated the playwrights, poets, and painters among the workers themselves. Then there are five sub-divisions:—

1. The Period of Preparation for taking possession of the new world. This began in 1918, when the central and district Proletcult theatres were organised. This was the beginning of the systematic work. The district theatres were formed of newly-established or reorganised dramatic circles. The principle followed was that of forming the companies of representatives of heavy and light industry. That brought out the fact that the existing circles were composed of clerical staffs, and not of workers. This was remedied by the inclusion of the latter. The productions at this time were of a revolutionary character, designed to be played at the Front at a time when Mamontoff was making his advance. A piece that passed through all Russia was "The Red Truth," by

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Vermicheef, who also wrote "The Festival of the Devil." He was hanged by Mamontov. Plays by Verharn and others drawn from the works of proletarian poets were popular.

2. Period of Military and Revolutionary plays. This was during the civil war, when provincial Studios were in danger of being involved in fighting, and worker-actors often stepped straight from the theatre to the trenches to fight and to agitate. In spite of many difficulties, imitative forms of art were produced, and art and craft were busy with backgrounds.

3. Period of Semi-Relief. The strain begins to pass. Pieces now exhibit the spirit of sport and play. There is a start at acrobatic performances. Initiative and creation turn to the circus with a view to transfer the circus to the theatre. The workers want to let off steam, and seek full self-expression. Creative forms of art emerge.

4. Period of Full Relief. Satire and Parody. The workers are letting off steam at a great rate. Both acting and training are imbued with the true spirit of sport and parody. Great development of circus creative ideas.

5. Period of Construction. The workers now enter upon the real business of construction. They become preoccupied with mechanical problems. Chiefly the problem of a mechanical structure according to which the New Russia is to be built. They use machine forms and tools on the stage as symbols of the new industrial civilisation. These periods have been marked throughout by a powerful heroic impulse which has manifested itself in two ways. First, there was Patriotism aiming to possess, to strengthen, and to perfect Russia. Second, there was Laughter directed at the vanities, follies, and weaknesses of the old and new order alike. Throughout there has been an expression of romantic heroism symbolical of Labour's struggle with Destiny.

What is the present-day organisation, aim, and method of the Proletcult? The organisation is based upon voluntarism and co-operation. The members of Workers' theatres and studios are volunteers drawn from factories and workshops and other Trade Unions organisations. They give all the

## THE PROLET CULT THEATRE

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time they can spare from their bread-and-butter work to the theatre. Often they study and play till the early hours of the morning. They receive no pay from the theatre, and do not expect it. Money necessary for the upkeep of the theatres and studios is drawn from a fund to which all subscribe. It should be said that the workers have no rent to pay for theatrical accommodation. Owing to the transference of private property to the Government and the working-class population, there is no lack of suitable buildings and rooms for theatrical purposes. In Russia you do not find that queer thing, a scarcity of theatrical accommodation, owing to avaricious landowners and speculative lessees and sub-lessees five and six deep. Genius and initiative are not frozen out of the theatre by profiteering landlords. Thus the economic problem of the Proletcult theatre is fairly solved.

The Moscow Proletcult theatre is established at the Villa Morosoff, a somewhat gorgeous Spanish palace, built by a millionaire just before the war. It is an imposing but tasteless piece of architecture, with a mixture of styles, Gothic, Moorish, and Renaissance, and an excess of ornamentation that would send some architects mad. Probably its eccentricity and tastelessness reflect the characteristics of the man who occupied it. At any rate, it provides a commodious centre for the proletcult actor volunteers. A very large ball-room, with a gallery at one end, has been converted into a stage and auditorium, which I will describe presently.

The aim is twofold, social and technical. On the one hand, to establish a centre of collective self-expression for the workers; on the other, to break down specialisation in the theatre. The conventional theatre is like a modern factory in which everyone has his special job. Thus there is the author, the producer, the actor, the painter, the composer, and so on. Each is specialised off. There is the leading juvenile, the character actor, the comedian, and so on. Each keeps to his special line, and no other.

The Proletcult volunteers want to be all-round men. To them the theatre is a collective institution, and the actor must be a synthesis of all activities. This is the meaning of Smyschlaiev's comprehensive system of training. They have definitely entered the theatre with the avowed aim of shaping

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it after their own likeness as far as possible. To-day they are engaged in a struggle to free it completely from all the old hindrances to free creative expression, to remove those objects and agents of representation and interpretation which do not belong to their own mode of expression of the collective life, and to replace them by others which belong peculiarly and particularly to them and to the theatre as a part of themselves.

This means that they have discovered the actor in themselves, and, beyond this, the stage most suited to communicate their experiences. All they ask for is leisure to play in the new playground in such a way as to become understood by each other and all. In doing so they want to be frankly theatrical. They seek to do away with the large hole through which the spectator views the play, and to come out into the open and freedom of the circus arena. They believe this is the true stage, the stage of the future, which will replace the picture-frame stage. Here actors can play to their hearts' content, quite free from the literary, the pictorial, and the individualistic restrictions. Free, too, from the restrictions of the separation set up by lighting and setting. In short, liberated from all things that interfere with or exclude freedom and clog up the springs of natural spontaneous expression.

So in accordance with sane principles of acting construction they have invented, through their representative, Eisenstein, an arena platform with just such surroundings and accessories as are necessary to give their movements the maximum degree of intensity, and to mark the difference, a very important one, between play and performance. The fact is they do not want to perform, they do not want to be distorted into the living lie called the professional actor, who is produced by a process common to the theatres of Western Europe and America, where the actor is an automaton pressed into standardised shape, like creased trousers, to supply stupid standardised entertainment to the most idiotic persons in a conventional audience.

A regard for the proper construction of this stage and its equipment has led them to sweep away all the cumber of actualists and abstractionists alike. The vast mechanical aids, revolving and adjustable stages, movable platforms, pulleys, and all the rest of the lumbering stuff have gone overboard. The pretty picture composition, mostly the



## THE PROLET CULT THEATRE

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outcome of paint-pot and paint-pot brains, and the lighting tricks by which the new stage conjurer sought to demonstrate the superiority of the swish-board over the paint-pot, have also walked the plank. Now nothing remains but the bare stage and a wooden structure. They have given this stage a circus form as though drawing a mystic ring round it. On this stage they have placed a platform with a frame and curtains through which the players enter and make their exit.

But let me put the progress of the Proletcult actors in proper order.

1. They looked within themselves, and found an abundant source of dramatic material. They needed an instrument to dig this out of themselves. So they took up improvisation. All that need be said of this here is that the improvised form of drama pleases, attracts, and corresponds to the expression of the workers, and is one to which all the workers contribute. It ignores the set rules of playwrighting, and demands that the play from the beginning must shape itself and move along, and this by the aid of all present. I will come to it presently. This method made a clean sweep of the bricks and limitations of the literary, photographic, and pornographic schools, with their habit of binding the actor to the experience of the author and of the actual persons in his play. The workers, then, improvised and produced plays which were entirely their own.

2. Next they invented a stage on which to construct the new form of drama. This form was to be a mould into which the workers could pour their experience according to the experience of the times. Hence the circus form of stage.

3. Next they established a system of training the actor which they considered likely to help him express the new form of drama. It would both develop his spontaneity and fashion the citizen in him. This training was based on the spirit of sport, which was really meant to be a re-affirmation of life. It seemed to say that its instructors and supporters had come to the conclusion that forms of art, drama, literature, and science were living under an isolating cloud. Art was cut off from life, literature was seeking sustenance at the dried-up well of introspective thought, science was more concerned with murdering men than with liberating them, and so on. Sport alone had an uplifting grace. Alone it contained a method of

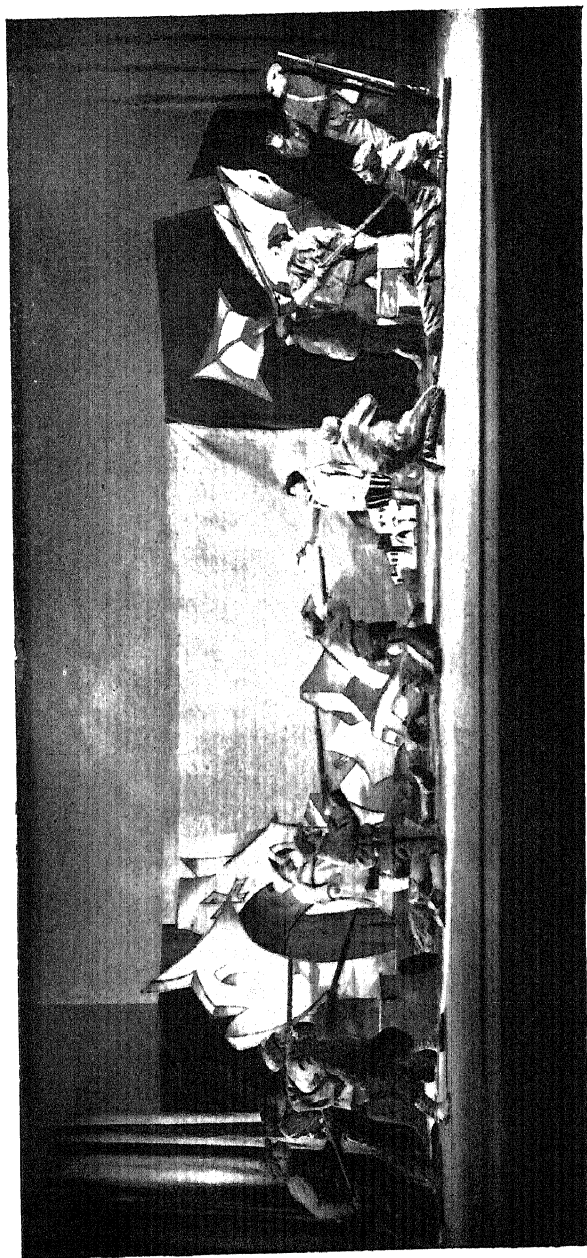
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producing those qualities of character and conduct which are absolutely necessary to a tolerant form of society. In short, to them it appeared as the most promising idealism. This much is, I think, borne out by a brief description of the elements of actor training which I take from a Moscow Labour paper.<sup>1</sup> "A big training of proletarian actors is taking place. In the first place, it is a physical training, embracing sport, boxing, light athletics, collective games, fencing, and bio-mechanics. Next it includes special voice training, and beyond this there is education in the history of the class struggle. Training is carried on from ten in the morning till nine at night. The head of the training workshop is Eisenstein, the inventor of the new circus stage."

The result of all this is a theatre of spontaneous co-operation designed to give the widest scope to the social play-spirit. Its principles are simplicity, spontaneity, improvisation, concentration, and co-operation. I will give one illustration of its work as I actually witnessed it. This particular work consisted of the performance of a satire built on a framework made out of Ostrovsky's play, "Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man." On entering the "theatre," I saw a large, elaborately decorated ball-room with a gallery at one end. A third of the room was used as a stage. This stage was in the form of a small circus. It had a platform and a frame with curtains. On either side of the platform were two curved approaches resembling segments of a circus ring, which helped the imagination to complete the circus construction. Facing the platform were rows of seats rising to the gallery. The floor of the arena was covered with a soft carpet. Scattered about was the usual circus apparatus, a trapeze, rings, horizontal poles, vaulting horse, slack wire, and other instruments not usually associated with the representation of social satire. But it soon became apparent that Ostrovsky merely provided a frame for a very witty parody made by the workers themselves. They had left only sufficient of the writer to allow anyone who knew his work to recognise him. I daresay a good many of the workers present did not recognise him, and were not much troubled by this. They could feed on the eccentric and exciting circus acrobatics. It was a parody on number

<sup>1</sup> "The Rabochaja Gazeta." April 22, 1923.



THE PROLET CULT THEATRE, MOSCOW.

The second or Revolution stage of development. *Fleni*, Act II. At this stage, imitative forms of art and craft began to appear in an attempt to produce backgrounds and costumes as symbolic aids to the action. Here the scenery is of a diminutive or toy-box character in order to give the figures a heroic size.



## THE PROLET CULT THEATRE

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two Russia and the emigres who believe that they represent real Russia. The revue also made sharp attacks on well-known foreign politicians and militarists, Mussolini, Joffre, &c., and it had its anti-religious moments. For instance, there was a procession of caricatures carrying candles, chanting a church service and bearing boards, with the inscription, "Religion is opium for the people." On the whole, it was very witty and gay, and went at a great speed, almost too quick for some spectators. It took many shapes and colours like a kaleidoscope. Undoubtedly it had a great deal of propaganda value, as its attack on the emigres and White Army in the unfavourable shades of meaning given to their behaviour was very effective. But perhaps the most amazing thing was the vitality of the players. Many of them were working men who had been toiling hard all day in the factory and workshop, and on top of this were putting in four or five hours' very hard work, by which they maintained an intensity of satirical expression that the spectator could hardly keep abreast with. Probably the success of the performance meant that the various forms of representation were passing from the circus to the conventional stage. Will the circus be the future theatre?

## CHAPTER VIII

### *THE LEFT GROUP (Continued)*

#### (iii) THE CLUB AND FACTORY THEATRES

**A**LL over Russia little co-operative groups of men, women and children are making theatres for their own use. These are the smaller organisations which have arisen from the private initiative of communists, workers, peasants, soldiers, and students without official aid. Their number is amazing. There are thousands in Moscow, Petrograd, and the cities, towns and villages throughout Russia. A glance at the pages of the Proletcult Bulletin for 1918, 1919, 1920 reveals column after column of notes on the theatrical work of countless working-class organisations scattered in all parts of vast Russia. The majority of these groups have formed theatres in clubs, rooms, cellars, in fact, every available place. Besides these there are a number of theatres established in factories. Hardly a factory but has its theatre, dramatic club, or circle.

These theatres, barn, room, cellar, club, and factory, are largely the outcome of the 1917 Revolution, and a great many owe their existence to the proletcult movement. Many belong to the proletcult organisation, and many more are influenced by its ideas. I say they are largely the outcome of the 1917 Revolution because the club theatre movement actually began in 1905 about the time of the first Revolution with about 5,000 workers' dramatic circles. This was the result of the Revolution on the workers. The movement was subsequently suppressed by the imperial Government, but re-appeared with the 1917 Revolution, and has had a highly successful career ever since. Factory theatres are of a more recent origin.

## THE CLUB AND FACTORY THEATRES

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Speaking of the Moscow Workers' Clubs, "Russian Information" (an official Russian journal), says:—

"The workers' clubs of Moscow are under the general direction of the Moscow provincial department for Political Education, and the town is divided into seven districts, the clubs of each of which are directed by a district department for political education. In each district there is a theatre at which companies of professional actors perform. The tickets for the performances at these theatres are distributed among the factories, the workers' committees of which again allot the tickets to individual workers. Each of the districts is divided into five areas; each area possesses a workers' club, and in addition to these, almost every large factory or works has its own club.

"The enthusiasm of the Russian workers for the theatre during the years of the Revolution is now well-known. As a rule, every club has its theatre with its company of amateur actors, mostly consisting of the younger men and women. The passion for the theatre never seems to wane either amongst the older workers or the young, amongst the actors or the audiences. In addition, every club has its choir, and often its own orchestra, which give frequent performances for the members."

Generally speaking, all these small organisations conceive of the theatre as an instrument of self-expression. It is a place wherein the new working class population can, in their leisure moments, play at destroying the old Tsarist Russia and building up a new Russia more after their own likeness. The organisation and work are mainly on voluntary and co-operative lines. Workers, peasants, and others come together, form a dramatic group, and together they support their particular theatre while co-operating in its work. The plays are mostly improvised, and many of the performances have a spontaneous co-operative character.

There are different methods of improvisation. Here is an example of one in which a group of workers took a picture and tried to "produce" it. The picture was hanging on the wall of the club room. Someone suggested they should take its subject, a woman and man holding a barricade, and dramatise it. They proceeded to analyse the picture. They inquired

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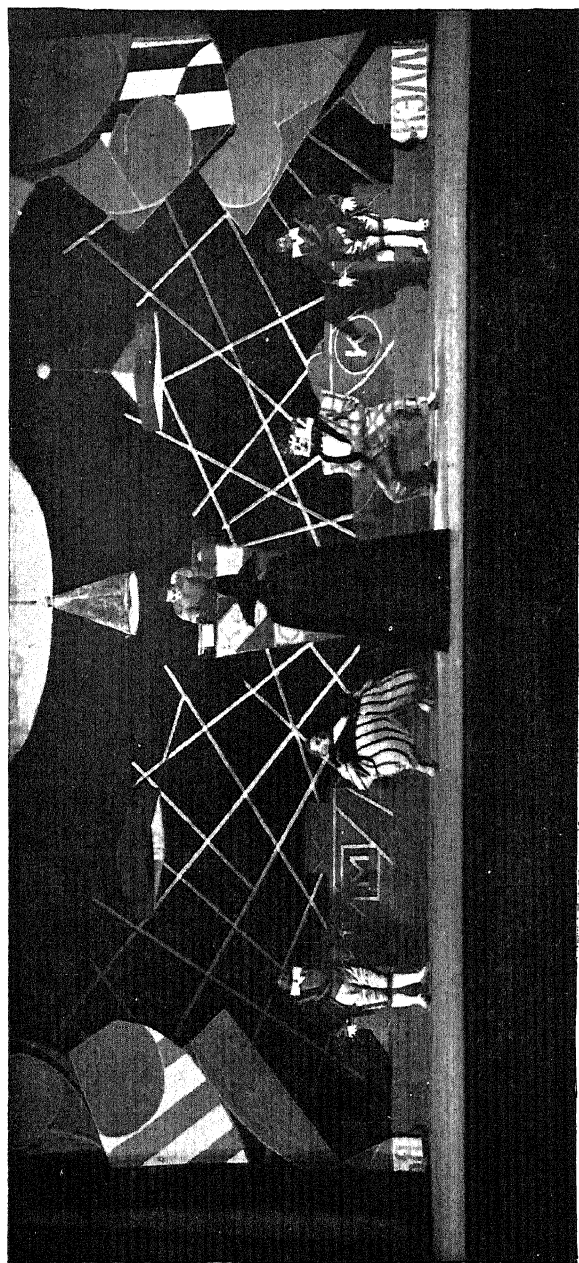
why the woman was at the barricade. This led to a discussion of the social relations of man and woman, the questions of labour, and the many questions arising therefrom. When they had fully analysed it, unfolded it, as it were, they arrived at the material for a play. First they produced the play without words. Then words were introduced. Thus collectively they built up the play, altering it here and there as they did so, till finally they gave it a fixed form. By this time it had ceased to resemble the picture. This play is called, "Don't Go." It has passed into the proletcult repertory.

Another method was followed in the case of the adaptation of "The Mexican," a story by Jack London. The story is that of a young revolutionist, who discovers that there is no gold left in the party coffers. He thinks that the coming Revolution is in danger. He happens to read in the newspapers that a boxing match is being arranged, the winner of which is to receive 500 dollars. He determines to win, and does. With the funds so obtained he starts the Revolution. A 500 dollar revolution does not sound a big affair. The play was made in the improvised way from the story. The latter was read to the assembled company, and the acted parts and the divisions of the scenes were decided by them, while other important details were also determined. The result was highly successful. When the production took place many of the scenes actually united the stage and auditorium.

In all the proletcult mass productions, with some of which I shall deal in the next chapter, much emphasis is laid on improvisation and of course co-operation. A good deal is left to the actor. In this, no doubt, some of the influence of the *Commedia dell'arte* can be traced. The Italian comedians were given bare scenarios to be filled in as the performance proceeded. As we have seen, Meierhold opened a studio for the study of *Commedia dell'arte* ideas and methods.

The production of revolutionary episodes is as follows. The stage-manager relates to the dramatic circle the history of the movement to which the episodes belong, then selects an interesting episode, and describes striking individual figures. Soon the circle is penetrated by the atmosphere of the time, and receives exact ideas concerning the social causes of this or that movement springing from the main one. Then the





THE PROLET CULT THEATRE, MOSCOW.

The third or Acrobatic stage of development. *The Mexican*, by Jack London, as adapted by the workers. Act II.: The workers released from civil war and blockade began to let off steam. Theatrical art and craft forms become most distinct and original. The workers turn to themselves and the circus for inspiration. The scene is played upon the forestage and circus lighting is used.



## THE CLUB AND FACTORY THEATRES

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circle proceeds to produce a definite episode, using improvisation for the purpose. Here there is a difference from the traditional form of improvisation. Instead of the actors being left entirely to themselves, the stage-manager intervenes. He keeps the individual actors together, and directs the improvisation by indicating the path to be taken when any one leaves the right one. The most valuable portions of the scheme of the work usually belong to the actors, with the result that the play is a new one.

A good many examples of cellar and club improvised and co-operative performances could be given, but two or three must suffice. Political and revolutionary satire used to be very popular. To-day it is giving place to a gayer species of play. There are, however, many little theatres that exhibit political satire. A very good and biting example was performed not long ago in a cellar theatre. It was called "The Mangy Dog." It was a typical spontaneous co-operative performance. A great deal of the action took place in the auditorium with the aid of the audience. One saw, first of all, a sort of committee of "fat men" engaged in the purchase of human beings for cannon fodder. Military officers wearing illuminated death's heads appeared one after the other and ordered armies of workers. As soon as an order was given, the Flesh Kings sent their servants among the spectators, from whom they selected a favourable specimen of a magnificent young proletarian to be supplied to the army. He was hauled on the stage, nearly stripped, and made to go through a sort of war-time medical examination, of muscles, teeth, general fitness, &c. Then the Flesh Kings and Generals struck a bargain for the supply of masses of men according to sample. An indignant revolutionist poet rushed on the stage, but finding he could do nothing, committed suicide, and was thrown back among the spectators. Next came a creature in a coat of many colours, who so pleased the Big Business Flesh Kings that they paid him a handsome sum in advance. The traders in human flesh were succeeded by a super-sweater got up in a gaudy dress, jewels and feathers. Having inspected the spectators through an opera glass, she selected an attractive young woman, who was hauled on to the stage, uttering piercing cries. The procuress, or whatever she was, simply tucked the victim under her arm and marched off

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with her. The conclusion was a tableau. The electric light was turned off, there was a peal of thunder, and the blood-red soviet star rose above tall factory chimneys. In the light of lurid flames the ruins of the Stock Exchange were seen. The audience consisted of a mixture of soldiers and sailors.

Here is a characteristic example of another kind of improvised and co-operative performance.

A small, low, stuffy room. There is a rudimentary stage at one end, but no footlights, or prompter. A part of the auditorium is divided off by a grey curtain, and the gangway on either side is hung with a grey curtain. Directly in front of the audience is a grey screen representing a wall. This is the stage, auditorium, and scene. The room is full. The stage in semi-darkness. There is intense silence. Everybody is waiting, deeply attentive. Slowly there comes the murmur of distant voices drawing near—voices of men, women, and children. Then directly through the auditorium a troop of hungry women move wearily toward the stage. Children follow. Then men appear. They move slowly, bent, and a low cry accompanies their movement. Turning neither to the right nor left, they move toward the grey wall. They are a group of men who, if bowed, are still firm and unbroken. The women crawl upon their knees with the cry, "Bread! Give me bread!" They bear babes at their starved breasts. They stretch out their white shrunken hands. They implore pity. The men utter gloomy complaints. The first rank reaches the wall. There is dead silence.

A voice begins to pray. "Great God, thou seest the sufferings of the people. Seest thou that their power is at an end?" Other voices join in, and all the men kneel to the unseen God behind the grey wall. The prayer dies away. Its last sounds merge in those of a valse from behind the wall. It becomes dark. A brightly lighted window appears in the wall through which dancing couples are seen. Magnificently dressed forms of men and women flit by. Some of the kneeling men raise their heads. Before their eyes, beyond the window, move these gorgeously appparelled couples. Amongst the crowd of dancers, lacqueys move, serving out choice food and drink. The kneeling workers hear how the idle class jeer at their wan faces and ragged clothes. The men begin to com-

## THE CLUB AND FACTORY THEATRES

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plain gloomily. The bourgeoisie overhear and are afraid. But someone calms them, saying: "These workers are stupid and cowardly. They are not organised, and would not venture to attack Capital—the belief in the godly origin of the wall is strong in them."

The complaints of the men grow menacing. They rise and move slowly forward. But it becomes dark again, and before them stands the firm wall veiled by the Unknown.

An agitator urges the men to move in a body and destroy the legendary wall. The men are willing to obey, but the demented women strive to hold them back from the struggle. But a group of courageous men throw themselves upon the wall. The scene changes to a luxuriously furnished room. There is a meeting of the head council of the world bourgeoisie. They consider the situation and decide how to meet it. The unrest of the workers must be met by force. The men are about to throw themselves upon the enemy, but the wall interposes. They retreat. The more courageous advance again. Soldiers. A struggle. The women waver. But the men's leaders press forward. The wall is destroyed. The sun rises in splendour. Upon a hill appears a stalwart worker, hammer in hand. The notes of the International burst forth. They are taken up by all present. The sun illuminates the scene as with a glow of victory. Curtain.

On the eve of last May Day, Russia's great festival day, I visited some Moscow clubs, where I witnessed a variety of performances by the workers, soldiers, sailors and peasants. These clubs were trade union ones, and they represented different shades of political and socialist thought. One, an extreme communist club, was more exclusive than others, and only admitted members, their wives and families. Admittance was by ticket obtained from the T.U. Generally speaking, the workers' club performances are open free to the members of the club and their friends, as well as to other workers who are not members. And anyone who likes can participate in a performance. The trade unions have their own club performances. Everything is on a co-operative basis. The players are unpaid. They are working men and women engaged in regular employment. They improvise the plays, act them, and make the costumes, scenery and properties. At all the

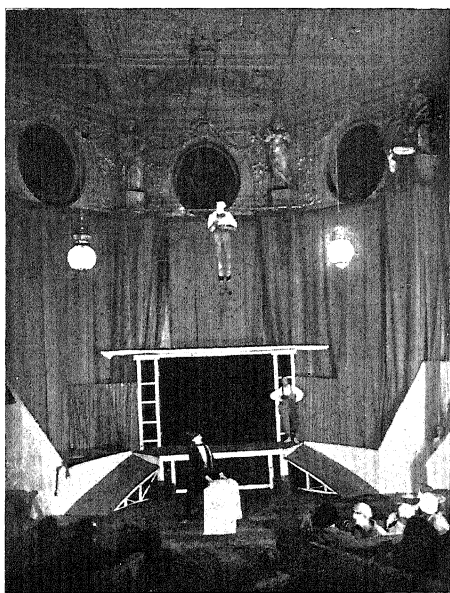
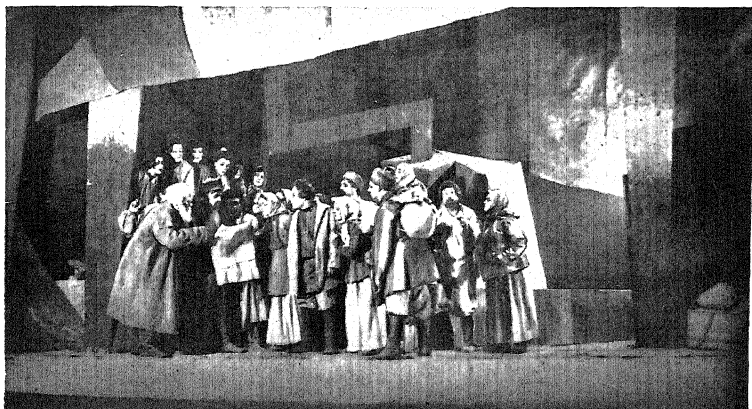
## THE LEFT GROUP

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performances children form a large proportion of the audience. They push their way through to the front seats, and stand four and five deep in front of the stage. They are eager, enthusiastic spectators, and follow every word and movement with the closest attention. On the whole, they reveal a capacity to concentrate on what is actually taking place that would shame many an adult spectator in England.

I began my evening with the performance at a Railway Men's Club. The piece was called "Once in an Evening." The story dealt with the rather hackneyed theme of a man who wants to start a Revolution and has an obstacle to overcome. In this instance it is a prison where he is spending an enforced holiday. A woman comrade is working to set him free. The Governor of the prison, who knows all about the revolutionary plot, agrees to release the man if she will consent to be his mistress. But no sooner has the agreement been made than the woman learns that the Revolution has taken place. In the end the prison is set on fire, the bold bad general is roasted alive amid communistic cheers, and everything comes communistically right according to plan. The moral is that revolution will out in spite of bureaucracy. I next went to the club of a central trade unions group. The play was the "Passer-by." It told us all about a peasant girl who loved a sprig of the old nobility with bad blood in him. A passer-by tells her about a new and wonderful land where there are no masters or servants or wage problems or deputies like politicians. All are equal and enjoy the fruit of their labour. It is the Workers' Paradise. The girl wants to go there, but she cannot leave her lover behind. The lover does not want to go because he cannot take his rich mother and her considerable belongings with him. Here is a pretty fix. To solve the matter, the lover conveniently dies suddenly. The First of May motive was ingeniously introduced. The peasant girl meets workers going to work. She reminds them that it is the great festival day. They must not work, neither must their fellow-workers. All are to observe it as The Day. There is a good deal of symbolism about these May Day plays. But the whole thing is simply propaganda.

At 11.30 I arrived at a trade union memorial club. It was established to commemorate the memory of one, Gorohov,



[Photo by the Author.]

#### THE PROLET CULT THEATRE: MOSCOW.

Contrasted stages of development. Above:—*Lena*, by Pletnev. The early Revolution stage with the workers in the confused conventional world of speech. Below:—The stage of Gay Satire. The workers, free to enjoy themselves, have discovered the highest form of dramatic expression, Laughter. They aspire to be masters of mirth, perfect mimes, accomplished acrobats. So they try to put the circus in the theatre. The circus scene and objects and agents were invented by Eisenstein. Both the stage and the steeply inclined auditorium are contained in a gorgeous ball-room.





## THE CLUB AND FACTORY THEATRES

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who was killed while fighting with Marmontov's company on November 7th. The performance and the room decorations and inscriptions were clearly designed to usher in May Day, just as a certain church service is designed to usher in New Year's Day in England. Indeed one could trace a good deal of resemblance between the two observances. Both have a religious air, one of orthodox Christianity, the other of communist faith. May 1st is Labour's New Year's Day; January 1st is Christianity's New Year's Day. The club room, which was crowded to suffocation, was festooned with evergreens, draped with red and hung with portraits of Lenin, Trotsky, and Marx, and with inscriptions. Some of the inscriptions ran, "We shall not surrender big industries to the sharks of the people," "We the Youth of Soviet Russia send our love to the young fighters of the whole world." Then there were the watchwords of Lenin, "Clamp the peasant and the worker," "Make the whole world one."

The exhibition was an improvised revue designed to emphasise the importance of May Day and its implications. One might call it a family affair in honour of the October communistic revolution. The scene contained a large clock, which faced the audience. Its hands pointed to midnight, and it bore the words, "1st May, all on the streets."

The curtain rose at five minutes to twelve on a group of the old order, soldiers, priests, &c. These scampered off as the clock struck twelve. A peasant descended in a basket from an aeroplane with a lot of presents, including a piece of red, which symbolised the Revolution. He asked all present to celebrate The Day. They showed their readiness by standing up in memory of the fallen fighters in the Revolution. Next entered a character with a big bottle full of tears supposed to have been shed by Big Business and Bourgeoisie who have lost their trade and property. Then a quantity of paper was unfolded, revealing a little ball. This represented the large promises and the infinitesimal conscience of the Entente. Following this came a large golosh with the Entente and social democrats seated in it after the fashion of the family that lived in a shoe. From this one gathered that the Entente and socialists were in a scrape while the communists were out of it. And then came portentous volumes and miles of red-tape. No

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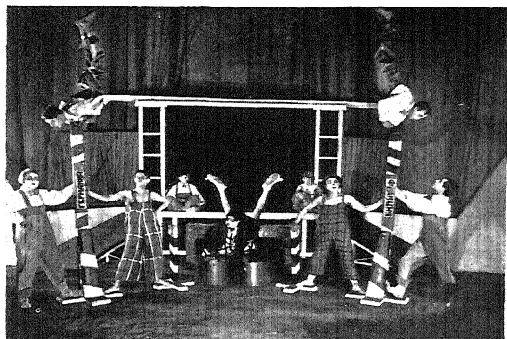
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one was required to tell us that this was a nasty smack at bureaucracy, which requires endless means to attain a small object. The symbolism continued to unroll in this fashion. Then came demonstrations and processions of workers and peasants' children, augmented by those in the audience. There were speeches by soldiers, and sailors and workers and by representatives of England, Germany, America, and Italy. Finally there were shots and a crash, individualistic inscriptions were torn down, revealing communistic ones. There followed transformation effects, including the union of workers of the world. Finally came the singing of the "International" in which all joined as usual. After which, at two in the morning, I tramped two miles studying the street illuminations, which announced that May Day had begun. A few hours later I saw a theatrical demonstration on a vast scale. It was the parade of troops and workmen's demonstration in the Red Square. There is a further reference to it in the chapter on Street Pageantry.

From time to time I saw many of these little theatres at work. I found them all alike, instructive, and demanding energy and endurance on the part of the spectator. I remember on one occasion going to the Soldiers' Club theatre in the Red Square. The performance began soon after seven o'clock. Three plays adapted from stories by Gorky were given after which, at three o'clock in the morning, there was a dance. This theatre, by the way, has a scenic studio, where all the scenery is designed by soldiers. In the workroom I saw scene models far in advance of anything the English stage has to show.

The Factory theatres are no less active and enterprising. In Petrograd there are twenty-three factory theatres under the direction of the art department of the Gubpolitprosvet. They work also under the observance of the organising committee of the factory theatres. There are in addition 160 clubs with worker-actor, dramatic, musical, and other circles.

The repertory of the factory theatre is approved by a Bureau which consists of an organising committee managing the art department and the representatives of the biggest factory theatres. The repertory is made up of classical plays and plays of the workers' theatres. Among the classics are pieces by Ostrovsky, Leo Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, Goldoni,



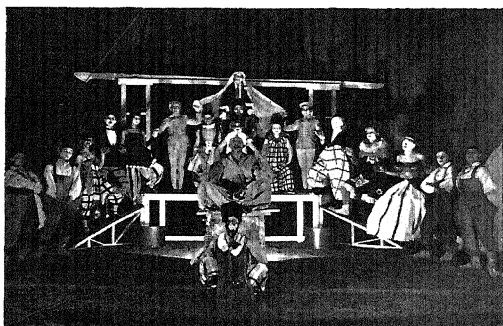
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[Photo by Author.]



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[Photo by Author.]



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[Photo by Author.]

### THE PROLET CULT THEATRE: MOSCOW.

Three scenes in the satire built upon a foundation provided by *Enough Stupidity in every Wise Man*, by Ostrovsky. It is made a medium for laughing at prominent personalities outside Russia. 1 and 3 show the grouping, aerial gymnastics, human pyramids, balancing, and suggest the rigid athletic training of the circus. All the actors are working-men to whom circus fun is a joy. 2 is the Marxian comment, "Religion is opium for the people."



## THE CLUB AND FACTORY THEATRES

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Synge ("The Hero"), Toller, and Upton Sinclair. The club art and production circles work as one circle, their aim being to emphasise the dates of the Red Calendar (October Revolution, 9th January, International Day, and so on.) Scenery is designed and elaborated by a section known as the Independent theatre, or by the circle itself.

The club circles work not only separately, but sometimes together when districts unite for collective representations, especially summer open-air performances. They also go to the villages in summer-time to act before and with the peasants. Special plays dealing with country life are prepared for the purpose. A special centre called the Independent theatre has been organised for the purpose of uniting the activities of the factory and club theatres, to collect and summarise dramatic material, to elaborate methods and to provide instructors for promoting the general work. The system of providing instructors for workers' theatres is not altogether a good one. Some of the instructors are drawn from the academic theatres, and bring their methods with them. For instance, I once saw an instructor from the Moscow Art theatre trying to rehearse actor-workers according to that theatre's naturalistic method, for which they were quite unsuited and had no inclination.

The aforementioned Independent theatre section of the factory and club theatres has a central workers' studio and group devoted to agitational work, samples of which are represented by the members at the club and factory theatres.

Finally, mention should be made of peasant theatrical activities. In Kostroma alone there are 600 village dramatic circles. In the Nishni-Novgorod district there are about 900. It is believed that this indicates that the peasants are working out a theatre and a dramatic form of their own. Probably they would be based on religious mysticism, whereas the workers are chiefly concerned with mechanistic thought and action.

## CHAPTER IX

### *THE LEFT GROUP (Continued)*

#### (iv) THE OPEN AIR MASS AND STREET THEATRES

THE Mass theatre is a collective demonstration of the Revolution in histrionic methods. It is comparatively new to Russia, especially the open-air form. It announces that acting is passing from professional deputies to the people themselves. There are two forms of collective or mass theatre. There is the form in which the collective principle is applied on a small scale by innumerable groups of people as described in the preceding chapter. And there is the form admitting of its application on a vast scale in open spaces such as the Red Square, Moscow, the Winter Palace Square, Petrograd, in front of the Bourse, &c.

This big theatre is also an outcome of the desire for popular expression of the new and changing life. Perhaps the open-air variety is more favoured by the Government than the roofed-in theatre, because it promotes their aim of bringing the people on to the streets and encouraging them to live creatively in the open. Performances are organised by Government representatives and professional actors. The methods followed are similar to those in the small mass theatre, namely, voluntarism, co-operation, spontaneity, and improvisation. There are two species of play performed on a vast scale in the open. One is called a political mystery, and deals with a big event of the Revolution which has now become historical, for instance, the fall of the Kerensky Government. The other is a revolutionary cycle, and consists of a series of historical episodes strung together

The following is an example. The members of the Petro-

## THE OPEN-AIR MASS THEATRES

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grad Proletcult took part in an interesting experiment in the winter of 1919-20. This took the form of the representation of a cycle of the People's Revolutionary Movements in Russia. The cycle included the following historical movements: (1) The Bolotnikov Movement, (2) The Rasin Movement, (3) The Pugatschev Movement, (4) The Dekabristen Movement, (5) The Peasant Movement, after the Manifesto of 1861; (6) The Movement of January 22nd, 1905; (7) The December Movement in Moscow. The dialogue was largely improvised by the players after the stage-manager had read over each historical episode to them. Another of these dramatic improvisations appeared in the performance of *The Red Year* by the Petrograd Dramatic Studio. The piece was in eight pictures: January 22nd, 1905, A Student's Family in Moscow, A Mutiny in the Military Prison, The Arsenal, the Police Watch, Barricade, At the Front, In the General Staff. These performances were entirely of a collective and improvised character. The players were young professionals and amateurs. It seems that this particular tendency towards mass and improvised representations is very widespread. Numerous mass theatrical circles have sprung up in the provinces among the peasants as well as among the workers and students. In one district, Busuluski, the peasants not only improvised important pieces, but they very skilfully made the necessary scenery and dresses without help of any kind, and this at a moment when materials for the purpose were extremely difficult to get. In Astrakhan a revolutionary piece, "The Sacrifice to Freedom," was improvised in the Tartar speech. In short, a very long list of collective and improvised exhibitions could be quoted if space permitted.

A highly important event with a bearing on the development of the mass theatre movement deserves to be noted here. The first Congress of the Workers' and Peasants' theatre took place in Moscow in November, 1919. The delegates to this Congress fell sharply into two parties, which contended throughout for possession of the Theatre. One party, the Proletarian, consisting of Communists and Militarists, fought for a Proletarian theatre and all this implies. The other, the Peasant party, fought for a theatre of a more conservative type in which mysticism and Utopianism were to be expressed. The whole

## THE LEFT GROUP

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discussion was very long, and embraced a multitude of ethical and æsthetic questions with which students of the European theatre are familiar. A very great significance can be attached to this Congress, for it was so unique in the history of the theatre as to stand practically alone. Never before, so far as I know, have the workers and peasants of a great nation met together in solemn conclave to discuss the theatrical situation, the essential reforms of the theatre, and to decide on the best means to make the theatre take its rightful place as a great popular representative institution—that is, an institution of the people. In England the workers have not yet discovered the importance of the theatre.

Mass performances on a heroic and gigantic scale have been given from time to time since 1918, in which outstanding directors, decorators, actors, and half the populations of certain districts have taken part. In each of these performances many thousands of persons have participated. For instance, in a "mystery" played before the Bourse, 80,000 persons took part, the majority of whom were the ordinary public. The five scenes of this "mystery" were:—1, The Communist Manifesto; 2, The Second International; 3, The Russian Commune; 4, The Realisation of the Soviet Republic; and 5, Apotheosis.

A characteristic example appears in the "Storming of the Winter Palace," the performance of which has been well described by the reliable eye-witness, Holitscher. Here is a literal translation of what he says. It seems that he was seated at a window of the former State Archives Department, which commanded a full view of the proceedings. He compares this mystery with the mediæval ones also performed in the open, and remarks that the drama on Revolution Day may rightly be called a political mystery. The people became angels and demons.

Two large stages, White and Red, had been erected in front of the Winter Palace, the immense semi-circle of which formed the background of the play. To the right was a white one; to the left a red one. In the centre they were connected by a high arched bridge. At the start 1,500 people were the actors. They included some professional actors, pupils of the theatre schools, members of the Club for Proletarian Culture, of the



## THE OPEN-AIR MASS THEATRES

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Theatre Societies, of the Red Army, and the Baltic Fleet. But at the conclusion more than 100,000 people were participating, pouring out from the tribunals and from the houses. The spectacle began at ten at night. A searchlight attached to the top of the Alexander Column lit up as bright as day the white stage to the right, on which the Provisional Government of Kerensky was holding a meeting. From the other side, from the invisible Red stage, an indistinct murmur was proceeding; it was the low murmur of the multitude who had had enough of the war, but who had to submit to Kerensky's word of command, as the ministerial council under the presidency of the Tribune had just resolved to pursue the war to a victorious termination. The searchlight was turned on to the Red stage. There one saw workmen and women, children and cripples reeling home tired from the factories; maimed soldiers toiling up to the bridge because the order had been issued that new armies were to be formed. At the same time on the White stage capitalists pushed sacks of money with their bellies towards Kerensky's throne, and ministers jumped from the ministerial bench and collected all the valuables in a heap, whilst from the dark side the cry of "Lenin" rose above the murmurs, at first indistinctly, then louder and louder. Next Kerensky was seen on his throne at the head of the ministerial bench gesticulating, waving his hands energetically and pointing to the money-bags. But the ministers remained undecided. They fidgetted about on their bench as from the invisible Red stage the tumultuous sounds became more rhythmic and more collective; one could now hear the notes of a song, which might or might not be the "International." Kerensky was still speaking and gesticulating to the ministerial bench, but the restlessness and indecision had become general. The whole row, clad in grey, were seen to bend over together to the right, then with a sudden jerk to the left. This was repeated several times with increasingly violent movements. Then came Kerensky's celebrated women's battalions. They mounted the stage with parodied movements, waved their rifles, and shouted to Kerensky, "Mirituræ te saluant." As the White stage became wrapped in darkness, the Red one was illuminated. Workmen, women and children, soldiers with arms, and people of all kinds were seen crowding

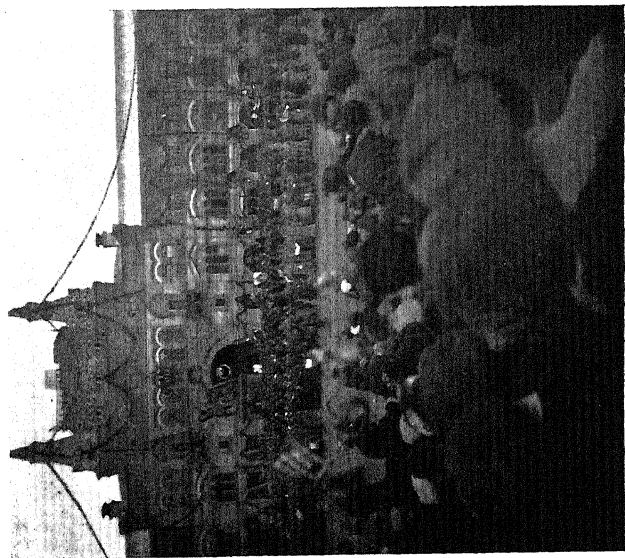
## THE LEFT GROUP

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round a gigantic Red Flag. The factories, the prisons—large red scenic constructions with barred windows, their interiors lit up with glaring red light—opened their doors wide. Crowds increasingly emerged from them, and clustered round the Red Flag. From the collective surging crowd the "International" rose as a powerful articulate chorus. The word "Lenin" was hurled to the sky as by one mighty shout from a hundred thousand throats. In the meanwhile the battalions had drawn up in order round the flag, ready to march across that bridge which connected the two stages. The searchlight was switched on the White stage. The ministerial bench was rocking as if shaken by a storm. A volley came from the Red side. Kerensky's bodyguard rushed with waving rifles to the bridge. The ministerial bench fell with a crash. From a side street of Uritzky Square two motor cars rushed up to the White stage, sounding their horns furiously. With a desperate leap, Kerensky sprang from his throne over the fallen ministerial bench to the steps which led from the stage to the ground, where the motor cars received him and his ministers. They rushed madly across the square past the column to the Winter Palace, the gates of which opened with the rapidity of lightning and admitted them.

The Winter Palace now began to take a part in the play. All the first storey windows were suddenly illuminated by a most brilliant light. At the same time fighting on the bridge continued. Accompanied by the rattle of machine guns and wild firing, an action developed, and hand to hand fighting took place between the Red Army and the Whites, who had remained behind. Dead and wounded fell down the steps, tumbling over the parapet of the bridge on to the pavement of the square below. In the meanwhile the lights in the Winter Palace were turned on, turned off, and again turned on. For several minutes the battle raged on the bridge, till at last a decision was reached. The whole fighting mass of the Red Army, united and conscious of its strength, this mass singing the "International," pressed down the steps towards the Winter Palace. Regiments emerged from side streets of the Uritzky Square, and joined those coming from the stage in tens and tens of thousands.

Now from the direction of the Neva the sound of thunder was



*Photo by Author.*

The 1st of May in Moscow.

Two scenes showing the theatrical character and festival spirit of the parade of the Red Army and the Trade Union demonstration carnival in the Great Red Square. The architecture is festooned with evergreens and draped with gay bunting. In the right illustration is seen a lorryful of children almost buried beneath evergreens and coloured banners. The whole is in the best spirit of the Middle Ages.



*Photo by Author.*



## THE OPEN-AIR MASS THEATRES

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suddenly heard. It came from the "Aurora," the historic battleship that bombarded the Winter Palace in November, 1917, which was firing its guns from the same position where it still lay anchored in the Neva, having been ordered to participate in the mystery play of the Revolution.

Again the Winter Palace came into action. A gate opened and cars rushed through with Kerensky and his adherents. They made for the Millionaja, and so away.

A hundred thousand was now approaching the Winter Palace. The immense square was crowded with marching, running, singing, shouting people, all pressing towards the Winter Palace. Rifle shots, the rattle of machine guns, the terrible thunder from the "Aurora"—all this was awful, arresting, almost indescribable. Then came rockets to announce the end. The guns of the "Aurora" became silent, the shouting died down, and the mass melted in the night.

No one who sees a mass spectacle of the kind can fail to be impressed by its magnitude, and the almost ecstatic spirit of the multitude. Of course, it bears various interpretations. The political minded will see in it a habit of counter-revolutionists to avail themselves of the opportunity afforded by a "theatrical bombardment" to foment risings and to teach the method of carrying them out. The sociologist, the historian, the mystic, the moralist, the psychologist will each see it in his own way also. As for that rarity, the man of the theatre possessing social ideals, to him it can appear only as a revelation, pregnant with suggestion towards that theatre of the future which shall fully answer the need of spiritual social service.

## CHAPTER X

### *THE LEFT GROUP (Continued.)*

#### (v) STREET PAGEANTS AND WORKERS' CAFES CHANTANTS

THE new theatrical life of Russia of which the Left theatre might be said to form the creative seed, spreads in ever widening circles, from room, cellar, club, and factory theatre, to the open-air mass theatre, thence to dramatic street-corner plays, demonstrations, parades and processions, and thence to the very "haunts" of the workers themselves.

In some ways all this is a return to the spirit of the Middle Ages, when the people were free to express themselves, and did so in art and craft and drama on the widest possible scale. But there is this difference between the old and new mediævalism. The old was actuated by a religious motive. The plays performed in the open, in the market place, in front of churches, and so on, had a strong religious motive. This was shown by characters such as gods, angels, demons, and bishops, who acted in mysteries and moralities. To-day a secular motive takes the limelight, so to speak. Politics hand in hand with new social aspirations occupy the central place in the thoughts of the people. Subordinated to these, but linked with them, are the higher forms of expression, art, drama, literature, and poetry. The incessant cry of "All on the streets" is then simply a sign of a mediæval conception of life under the sun and stars, with singing and dancing, and all the gaiety that can be pressed into the self-expression of a people. The street pageants exhibit the principles found in the old folk fairs, in nature plays, and the mass performances just described. Take the parade of Trotsky's army and the trade union demon-

## STREET PAGEANTS

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stration on May Day in the great Red Square, Moscow. Where is there a closer imitation of a gigantic theatrical spectacle? It is imposing. It is overwhelming, in form, colour, movement, and sound. It is even "staged" with consummate mastery of theatrical effect and a strong intuition of the psychology of the crowd. It is a mixture of old and new mediæval pageantry on a vast scale. There is the stage formed by a great square stretching on all sides as far as the eye can reach. There is the unique setting of old and new Russia. As a background you see the Chinese wall of the Kremlin. To the left, the wonderful old Pineapple Church. To the right a Greek chapel or two, and the fine old Government buildings. As a fourth wall there is the monumental modern Arcade. This masonry is festooned with evergreen, and heavily draped with blazing banners and posters. Against the centre tower of the Chinese wall is a red rostrum for the new gods, and immediately behind this is a great blazing portrait of the greatest of these, Lenin himself. In the arena so formed the spectacle takes place. There is the parade of the army partly in the glory of the old Russian uniform with its nationalistic air of 1,000 years ago, and partly in the livery of King Machine, who commands the new services, air, tank corps, &c., and is served by battalions of young workers. The parade is followed by the gay procession of children—children in white—children like flowers amid bowers of evergreen. And then comes the merry trades procession, and you see emblematic cars, theatrical cars, industrial cars, exhibiting the occupations and recreations of the workers and peasants. Then there is the play of satire, the interchange of wit, the merry-andrewism of clowns and buffoons, and above all, the response of a great crowd of spectators ready to let themselves go in the true spirit of street pageantry and revelry. In all this you see a population combining in spite of different points of view, of differences of character, to give expression to a predominating idea under whose touch they are set dramatically unfolding.

A strong element of theatrical pageantry is found in the Russian churches and chapels. I remember entering one of Moscow's largest churches on Ascension Day. It was crowded to the door. Within a service was taking place amid surroundings of almost unimaginable splendour. I saw midway a domed

## THE LEFT GROUP

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space whose walls were hung with saints in massive gold frames. Beyond, through open doors of gold, came a vision of a sanctuary of gold. Tall golden columns sprang to a vaulted ceiling of pure gold, athwart which a stream of golden bannerets moved with the rhythm of the stately service. Through the air, fragrant and faint with incense, gleamed coloured altar lights. Priests in vestments of glittering gold and silver moved gravely to and fro. And every now and then a procession of richly-coloured figures issued from the chamber of gold pierced the multitude as with shafts of colour, and circulated in their midst, bearing aloft the Golden Candle and the Golden Book. Without the charmed sanctuary, priests in shimmering raiment and a sweet-voiced choir added to the æsthetic rhythmic harmony. Here surely was a sacred pageant, some of whose influence and characteristics it would not be hard to trace in the mysteries of the street pageant.

A further note of mediæval pageantry is struck by the strolling players who nowadays visit the workers' pubs. These bands are formed by professional actors who are compelled by the prevailing economic conditions to augment their meagre income by going from pub. to pub. of an evening. They have many of the characteristics of the strolling players of the Middle Ages. As there are hundreds of pubs. in Moscow and Petrograd, their performances are very brief. And as there are many bands of players to succeed each other, the performances are continuous. In each pub. you will notice a little platform. During the evening this platform is occupied successively by troupes composed of five or six concert and dramatic "turns." Each troupe gives a performance lasting about twenty minutes. Then a collection is made which the members share, after which they leave. Generally these strolling players and singers exhibit considerable talent, and doubtless their work has much effect on the workers.

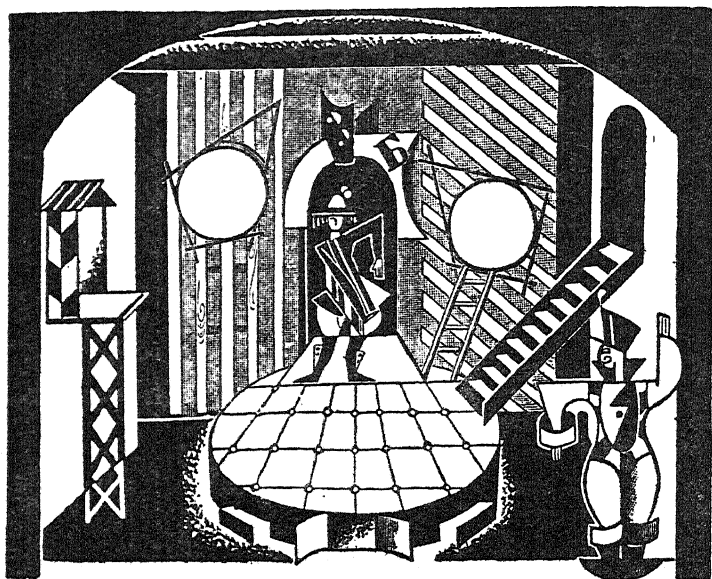
Artists, too, are strongly actuated by the prevailing tendency. "Art on the streets" is their cry. Art of the People, by the People, for the People, it really means. Out of the studio, out of the house, out of the museum must come everyone and everything able and calculated to enrich and quicken the lives of the workers. Festooned architecture, garlanded monuments, flower strewn paths, gaily costumed street singers,



## STREET PAGEANTS

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musicians, dancers, embellishment, adornment, the Art of Life, and the Life of Art, the beauty of life and the life of beauty, in such is the art form of the streets of Soviet Russia.



MASTFOR THEATRE.

*Agitational Opera-Bouffe Scene, showing figures applying the Machine dance, and Scenery influenced by the Circus.*

## CHAPTER XI

### *THE LEFT GROUP (Continued)*

#### (vi) THE LITTLE THEATRES OF REVOLUTIONARY SATIRE

**S**MALL established theatres have sprung up within the last two or three years which combine the methods of the Meierhold and Proletcult theatres, especially satire and improvisation.

Two of the four theatres dealt with in this chapter properly

## THE LITTLE THEATRES

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belong to the Centre Group. But as they apply improvisation and lean towards the Left, I have included them in the Left Group. A third one is doubtful. No one is quite decided whether it belongs to the extreme Left or the extreme Right, or is a mixture of the two. I will give it the benefit of the doubt, and let it rest here.

The Mastfor (the word is a compound of workshop and Foregger) has made a reputation for parody of an extremely biting kind. But of recent months it has fallen into disgrace with the Left owing to its tendency to cater for the Nepmen, as the new shopkeepers and traders are called. This little theatre was originally conceived of as a means of laughing at certain extravagant tendencies, national, social, theatrical and other. The follies of the workers and peasants, the indiscretions of the Commissars were ridiculed. Like the Proletcult theatre, it condemned with critical laughter the philosophy, politics and general conception of social life exhibited by other nations.

N. M. Foregger started his little theatre three years ago with a small group of young actors. He had no money, no proper accommodation, no costumes, no decorations. His "theatre" was a small room used for Press purposes. In spite of these difficulties, he contrived to establish a practically new theatre devoted to parody.

His first big success was made in a series of very clever parodies of the Central Kamerny theatre, Moscow Art theatre, Meierhold's theatre, and the Big theatre, in all of which he found much to laugh at.

He next tried more serious work. But the public would have none of it. He had established himself as a remarkable laughter maker, and they declared that if he did not laugh at the eccentricities of his fellow-producers and actors, they would laugh at him. And they did.

This was not fair. Foregger had proved that he was a first-class producer, and that he had abundant invention, and he was entitled to experiment in more fields than one in order to work out his idea of an important new theatre.

In time he came to try his hand on a new form of entertainment in which, so it is said, he aimed to please both the workers and the Nepmen or new bourgeoisie. This gave great offence

## THE LEFT GROUP

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to the workers, his old patrons. The matter came to a head with the production of an entertainment called "The Mystery of the Canary Isles." I saw this entertainment during my last visit to Moscow. The Mastfor company were then housed in a rather commodious flat, or so it appeared, at 7 Arbat. Mounting a flight of rather dark and dirty stairs brought you to the pay box. To the left was a large room used as a foyer and refreshment room. The walls were hung with samples of futuristic activity. Behind the pay box was a room with, I think, seven rows of chairs divided in the centre by a passage. At one end was an intimate stage with a blue curtain and the usual centre gangway connecting the stage with the auditorium. This was the theatre. The entertainment was a mixture of opera bouffe and parody. The scenery was not easy to describe. The impression it gave me was that of a studio of a futurist painter the day after a drunken orgy. The costumes also were very eccentric. The characters resembled figures that had stepped out of wild futurist pictures. They were constructions by C. Ukevitch. I dare say this was a part of the parody, and perhaps the best part, for the forms and colours certainly revealed a great deal of eccentric ingenuity—the kind of eccentricity for which Foregger is noted. The movements of the characters were in harmony, extremely exaggerated and funny. Perhaps the best description of the actors would be futurist marionettes. They were very much like mechanical dolls with patches of colour dabbed on their faces and bodies, and a sort of cerebral action, as the futurists call it. I mean the action you get after a movement has been broken up by the brain. These figures laughed all over, features, bodies, limbs. At the same time they indulged in a good deal of clowning and knockabout business and downright vulgarity. The musical part was a cheap imitation of cabaret entertainment. These elements were introduced, no doubt, to please the money-making Nepmen. Hence the anger of the workers, who like the Nepmen about as much as the devil likes Resurrection pie.

They were so annoyed that they addressed a long letter of protest to the editor of "The Scene," to which he replied point by point.<sup>1</sup> The workers complained that while Foregger

<sup>1</sup> "Zrelishcha" (Moscow).

## THE LITTLE THEATRES

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gave something to the workers which they liked, namely, eccentricity and machine dance, he also gave them something that greatly offended them, namely, a mixture of bourgeois operetta and clowning which attacked the Revolution, and, what was worse, attacked it in order to please the new bourgeois audience. They contended that certain parts of the exhibition were pornographic, if not absolutely indecent. It was clearly stuff designed to attract the shopkeeping class and to ridicule revolutionary ideas. They proposed to call the attention of the Cheka to the matter, with a view to having it stopped. The editor of the paper sought to defend Foregger. He said the latter was not altogether to blame. He was a victim of the new conditions which compelled him to provide a form of entertainment suited to the old and new public. "The Mystery of the Canary Isles" was Foregger's first attempt at opera-bouffe. He sought to reconstruct the old bourgeois species of operetta in the form of the new fighting agitation operetta. To some extent he had succeeded. But in seeking compromise he was between two stools, and would certainly come to grief unless he were very careful. As a sop to the workers, the editor of "The Scene" strongly advised Foregger to set to work and reorganise his theatre.

This incident has an extraordinary theatrical significance. It reveals the workers seeking for the first time in their history to lay down the law of theatrical exhibition. Their letter of protest is simply their voice raised in control of the theatre. To strengthen it, they call on the Cheka (the police) to intervene. It looks as though they were not criticising the exhibition from a spectator's point of view, but from the Cheka's.

They may be right concerning Foregger's latest intentions. They may be wrong. The fact is that Foregger is a producer of remarkable talent, who is very much criticised on account of his two-sidedness. This is shown by the contradiction between his theory and practise. In his writings he denies the absolute power of the stage manager; but in practise he is a dictator who leaves nothing to the actor, but imposes all his ideas, very able ones, on him. Again, he professes sympathy with the extreme Left, while trying in his productions to please the extreme Right. As his friends say, his position is a difficult

## THE LEFT GROUP

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one. In Moscow the opera-bouffe is coming into favour. At the same time the circus, with its skill and eccentricity, appeals to a working-class audience. Foregger's critics say that he is mixing opera-bouffe and circus eccentricity. His friends say he is evolving a new form and only cares about the proletariat.

What has Foregger contributed to the New Russian theatre? He conceived of his theatre as an instrument for communicating the true spirit of revolutionary satire. He cleverly organised his theatre to apply this instrument. But he has lately introduced a new element in opera-bouffe which is said to destroy the effect of his satire. On the other hand, it is said to be a new agitational form of opera-bouffe.

All admit that in eccentric invention he is unsurpassed. At present his reputation for invention may be said to rest on his mechanical or Machine Dance, which has strongly caught the fancy of the workers. In Foregger's theory, dance begins with the body and its machine-like attributes. It does not begin with music, as the classic and contemporary schools maintain. Accordingly he has built the dance on the basis of the mechanical possibilities which are in the human body, taking as an example the movements of the Machine.

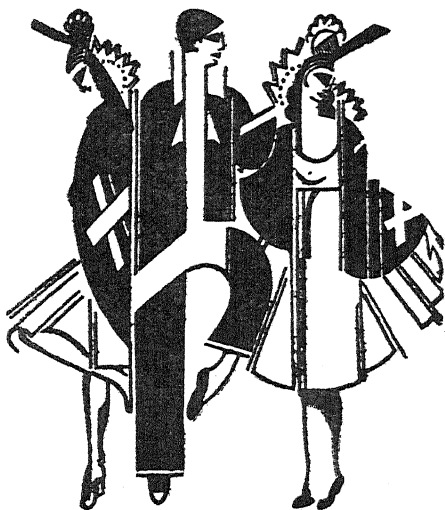
The mechanical dances have provided good training for eccentric dances, and it is generally believed that Foregger will be the first man to create a perfect eccentric form of dance. It is one more triumph for King Machine.

The Little Crooked Jimmy theatre deserves mention here. It is directed by A. G. Alexseef, and resembles the Mastfor in its machine dances and parodies of serious plays. The new Machine dance ideas as followed by Alexseef and others are very popular with the workers, who doubtless recognise in the mechanical movements of One Step, Two Step, Fox Trot, Cake Walk, the syncopated movements of working machines. The workers themselves excel in syncopation and machine rhythm. For this reason the stylistic gestures of the machine and the mysteries of Jazz music have become subjects of much study and experiment. The Crooked Jimmy has associated itself with N. N. Evreinoff whose "The

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Theatre of the Soul " was played in London. The piece was played at the C. J. theatre with an appropriate representation of the psycho-physiological centres—soul, heart, etc. The remainder of Evreinoff's repertory revealed that he had gone over to the Left. Since the Revolution he has left the inside



LITTLE REVOLUTIONARY THEATRE.

The Crooked Jimmy Theatre. A Machine Dance applied to the "Cake-Walk."

of the soul, as it were, for the outside world where the liver reigns supreme.

The two other theatres have a more limited controversial basis. But they are none the less important and interesting. They are the Cemperante theatre at Moscow, and the Moving theatre at Petrograd. The Cemperante is represented to be a little theatre of improvisation. The method it pursues is

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that of improvising on the central idea or theme of a play. The producer gives the idea and the company improvise. Like so many of the little important theatres, it is poked away in one of the back streets, Tranatnoi by name. It is also part of a private house. To reach it you climb five flights of stairs, which means that it is five flights nearer heaven than the ground floor theatres. At the end of the journey you come to a rather spacious flat which has been converted into a theatre and its offices, one of which is the director's modest bedroom. The theatre itself is a small room, semi-circular at one end, where it is divided off to form a stage level with the front row of seats. There are six other rows (seven in all) rising from this level. The room has the appearance of a drawingroom with concealed white and yellow lights running round the moulding. I noticed that the stage "decorations" were got, at the time of my visit, in a rather novel way by lighting. They consisted of coloured patterns thrown on the whole backcloth or architecture by lantern slides placed in lanterns at the back of the auditorium, and in others concealed in the projecting architecture forming wings on either side of the stage. The effect was bewildering. Everybody and everything on the stage were "decorated." All were caught up and interwoven in the pattern whatever it happened to be. The actors' faces were unrecognisable. I have not the least idea what the aim was. Probably some sort of unity was sought. But it was not good, and it was not the sort of thing to be encouraged. It reminded one of the crude attempt to get colour into a scene by throwing green on to a neutral surface, say, the floor. The effect sought may be a green lawn. But as a rule the effect obtained is green actors and green everything else. It is the spirit of Verdant Green.

Improvisation enters a great deal into the work of this theatre. In the theory of the director, A. V. Bikov, improvisation can be applied to any dramatic form. Illustrations may be found in his own productions of "The Mystery of the Red Lion," "Two," "The Comedy of Grimace," and "Agony." He has lately been trying to find a new form, and for the purpose went into the country, where he and his company produced six tales. To the philosophic meaning of these tales they gave quite an extraordinary form. They deserted naturalism for



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new titanism, a term meaning a new "mystic" heroism. The bigness suggested had something to do with broad effects in line and colour laid on with a swift brush similar to those obtained by Foregger at the Mastfor theatre. This kind of thing is said to satisfy most the requirements of times in which people read as they run, and have no moments to spare for minute details. In Bikov's opinion it must be mystic in the modern sense in order to avoid exaggerated naturalism. By the new mysticism is meant, I think, mystic realism—a mysticism that affirms life and does not deny it.

The tales produced are called the Tales of Scarabee (perhaps this title has something to do with the Egyptian beetle). In the first one there are representatives of human culture, a capitalist, priest, professor, prostitute, worker, woman painter, woman singer, and a woman worker. Their movements are symbolised by a Machine that eats human beings instead of gold. This means they are parasites preying on each other and society. Together with a part of Moscow, they are torn off the earth, as it were, and flung to a new planet, where they encounter quite a different set of beings who have no acquaintance with the earth culture which the humans represent, and who possess the great gift of a magic desire for perfection. The human representatives of the earth culture fall under their influence and destroy the traces of their old life. The charm of the new people conquers them. Then the worker develops a desire to return to earth, which is gratified. Arriving on earth, he is reborn. He is reborn with a new faith of love and beauty which proves to be all that is necessary to unite him to the capitalist, professor, prostitute, and the rest of the reborn who return for the purpose. Having discovered the Key of Class Harmony, the play ends.

This curious mixture of science and ethics was clearly meant to appeal both to the Left and Right. There was the Machine idea and improvisation for the worker, and purification for the cultured. But it was hardly the kind of mixture to please the worker. He does not want the parasitic and exploiting class purified. He wants them swept away. That is why he appreciates "Mysteria-Bouffes," in which the Unclean are thrown overboard. The only positive thing in the play

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was the elimination of the old mysticism (or mysticism), as it might be called, which brings it into line with propaganda plays. The Communists have banned mysticism, metaphysics, and the higher trend of philosophic and religious thought.

This was one sample of "titanism," or the new "mystic" heroism. Besides the six plays, to which this one belongs, eight others are being prepared for production. The Cemperante theatre has a circle for the discussion of its work, to which anyone may belong. In addition to these Monday discussions there are occasional lectures.

The two other plays that I saw illustrating the application of improvisation were extremely interesting. One, called "Dva" ("Two,"), was a sort of Jekyll and Hyde play. The principal character is a mathematician with a dual personality, able to change his character at will. He demonstrates this in various ways by playing a very old parchment-like mathematician, then a young and active sailor, then an aristocrat whose aristocratic evening-dress had evidently attended many funerals, like that of Dick Phenyl in "Sweet Lavender." This psychological quick-change artist is in love with a painter's wife, who he tries to win by adopting many disguises. In the end he has a fit of madness and throttles the daughter. The part was very powerfully acted by a young actor of great promise named Chekov. The second piece was "Myxa" (Agony). In this production the scene and actors were decorated with a marble pattern thrown over them by the obliging lantern slides. Obviously the intention of the magic lantern lighting effect was to put the agony under marble restraint. Whether it succeeded or not I cannot say. The pattern got in the way so often I could not see the agony or the agonised. Though I disliked the pattern from the lantern slides frolicking among the chairs and tables, and taking liberties with the actors' faces, to say nothing of their make-up, I enjoyed the acting very much. If these plays were improvised, as I was assured they were, it was a very notable achievement, and certainly points the way to a new spontaneous and collective form of high-brow play.

If there is much to praise (and something to blame) in the work of the Cemperante, there is also a great deal to be said

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for that of the Peredvijnogo Theatre (Moving theatre) at Petrograd. Its two directors, P. P. Gaideburova and N. F. Skarskaja, are both theoreticians and practitioners of a high order. The Moving theatre was established eighteen years ago. It was conceived of as a means of serving the best ideals of art and social life connected with art. From the beginning it has been concerned with the eternal question of the mystery of human beings. It aims to unite the best spiritual forces of all classes in Russia, and seeks to realise its ideals both in its permanent home, so to speak, at Petrograd, and during its tours in Russia, when it visits many towns with its company and staff, repertory, decorations, costumes, in short, all its agents. In the difficult years since 1914 it has contrived to continue its aim at the highest while building according to new creative methods elaborated at its own studio under the guidance of their author, N. F. Skarskaja. Among the outstanding features of the theatre are the strong collective unity of the actors; the freedom of the actor, from whom the serf-like characteristics of the conventional actor have been removed; the abolition of the prompter (in view of improvisation); and the creative achievement of the actors united in collective effort.

There has been in this theatre, as indeed in all the significant theatres composing the new theatre, a steady and constant search for form in which to put the ideals to be communicated. Method has come to rest on improvisation. But it is a deeper improvisation than the Workers' theatres apply. It is an improvisation wrapped up with the mystery of the actor himself. Following the example of all the present-day Russian theatres, the Moving theatre puts the actor first. Then comes the spectator. Between the two there is a unity. It is obtained by the attitude of the spectator towards the actor. He must not be really in a receptive mood. He must evoke what the actor has to give him.

What is the creative actor? How is he produced? These are the questions implicit in the method of the Moving theatre. The answers are contained in the application of the method. The inquiry set up is a metaphysical one. And to go deeply into it would mean to become buried beneath a heap of metaphysical terms, soul, spirit, substance, consciousness, truth,

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and so on. At least this is the impression one gets from reading Skarskaja's long explanation.

Briefly, to him the creative actor is a being with a mystery within him. Within him, too, is the reservoir of sensibility and the creative power that actuates the external organs of motion. This mystery spontaneously rises into the voluntary, or region of the will, and finally after five stages the material and conditions are prepared for the manifestation of the creative act. A similar method of improvising the creative act is followed by Tairov, the director of the Kamerny theatre, as will be seen presently. Skarskaja does not describe his theory in these words, but the words describe Skarskaja's theory.

The seed of the creative act is, according to Skarskaja, a fundamental emotion—joy, fear, anger, &c., and the business of the creative actor is to organise this emotion and all the emotions belonging to it, as it makes its long ascent till it originates the creative word or movement. Thus "the task of the actor is to be a master of emotion, so as to express the substance of the mystery (the fundamental emotion) which is in him, and from which comes the word or movement or both. He must communicate to the spectator this mystery or fundamental emotion, as we call it, so as to let him take the creative way."

The realisation of the fundamental emotion is in five stages. These stages are concerned with seeking and finding the fundamental emotion. They correspond to the three stages of seeking and finding adopted by Alexander Tairov. Indeed there is a good deal of resemblance in the theories and methods of the two theatres, the Moving and the Kamerny. The directors of both strongly believe in a brain-and-body disciplined actor and theatre. Such an actor is to take full possession of his emotions, to play with them creatively, and to clothe himself in the result. He must use a subjective, disciplined, self-effacing technique for the purpose. How far this proposed mastery of material, means, and conditions can be carried is an open question as yet.

In 1918 the Moving theatre began to apply the new method,

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first in its studio, then in plays produced at factories. During the five years since all work has been conducted on the same plan. As in the case of the Kamerny theatre, the new principles have been applied to old and new classics. One of the directors, P. P. Gaideburova, has described in a little book of notes, "The Birth of Spectacle," how this may be done. The plays with which he deals include Tolstoy's "Power of Darkness," Alexis Tolstoy's "Death of Ivan the Terrible," Chekov's "Cherry Orchard," Bjornsen's "Beyond our Power," Tchekov's "Ivanoff," Maeterlinck's "Miracle of St. Antony," and Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet." All the characters in Romeo and Juliet, he observes, are very young and gay, and here the fundamental note of the play is youth and joy. He sees a sign of tragedy which he believes is only perceptible when we forget the tragic side. "The tragedy of the play, the tragic moments of it, will come out when we shall forget about them." The foundation of the tragic element in the play is found "in the error and joy, laughter and tears born in human beings." We may take it that joy is the emotion which should be used to organise the system of emotions in the play. Some persons think that love is the predominating emotion. Perhaps they are right.

The resemblance between the methods of the Kamerny theatre and the Moving theatre stops, I think, with acting. The brain and body discipline of the actor is similar in both centres. The stages and scenery are different. For instance, the production at the Moving theatre of "The Carnival of Life," a piece taken from the French, showed no traces of the search for rhythmic harmony in stage and scenery. The scene consisted of a movable transparent screen with two sides at right angles. Through the left side could be seen the revellers, and through the back a bedroom. The space formed by the two sides of the screen and the right side of the stage composed a shop. In the second scene this screen was turned so that the bedroom took the centre of the stage, the shop was behind the transparent side wall, and the entrance to the pleasure gardens was seen through the transparent back wall. The contrasts of life and death obtained by this means were very striking. But of course the flat screens and the flat stage

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had nothing to do with the predominant emotion or spirit of the play. And yet the new theory says that all the objects and agents of the theatre should be full of this.



THE NEW MECHANICAL DANCE.  
Invented by Foregger.



The State Ballet, Costume Design.

## CHAPTER XII

### *THE CENTRE GROUP*

#### (i) LUNACHARSKY'S THEATRE

**T**HE Centre Group comprises most of the theatres subsidised by the Government, and others that exhibit its general tendency of a compromise between the Left and the Right "Wings," between the theory and methods of the vanguard of the workers and the rearguard of the old intelligentsia. This Group does not comprise all the subsidised theatres. Meierhold's theatre is subsidised, but its theory and practice is different from those of the Centre Group. The

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Moscow Art theatre is subsidised. Its theory and methods also differ from those of the Centre Group. The one leans towards extreme communism, the other towards extreme individualism. The Centre is a combination of their moderate elements. In this Group are all the theatres and studios which are considered purely State theatres. These include the former imperial theatres in Moscow and Petrograd, also the Moscow Art theatre, the Chamber (Kamerny) theatre, the Jewish Central theatre, etc. The number of State theatres is less than formerly owing to economic conditions. At one time after the Revolution all the theatres in Russia were nationalised. But since 1921 some have been denationalised because the Government is not in a position to support them.

In the words of Lunacharsky, the People's Commissary of Education: "A new period began in 1921 under the new economic policy, which has placed the cultural work in Russia in extraordinary conditions. For the first time our resources have been measured out to us. Now we have to adapt our life to a constantly elaborated and ruthlessly enforced plan of State organisation. The State is endeavouring to do away with grants in kind, and to estimate everything in money value, the better to control the workings of its economic apparatus." . . . "We have been obliged to restore the private ownership of the theatres, and in consequence the cultural level at which we maintained them during the first years of the Revolution has considerably deteriorated. The academic theatres are groaning for lack of support." But against this must be set the statement that "the 'awakening' of large sections of the public in Russia through the war and the stimulus of the Revolution is a fact." The proletarian culture movement is spreading, and very largely affecting the theatre, as we have seen already. And there is considerable increase of public feeling against private traders, such as shopkeepers. On the whole, a return under improved economic conditions to the communist path opened by the Revolution is not improbable. At any rate,

<sup>1</sup> "Culture in the Soviet Republic." A. Lunacharsky. "Manchester Guardian" Reconstruction Supplement. July 6, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Scheffer. "Manchester Guardian" Reconstruction Supplement. July 6, 1922.



## LUNACHARSKY'S THEATRE

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all the theatres, whether privately managed or otherwise, are under the constant observation of Lunacharsky, and the Department of Education, linked with theatrical productions, is still in existence. Whatever be the fate of the other parts of the educational system during the present period of the Communist State, this part will be carried on. For this reason, if for no other, the building-up and the work of the cultural-educational theatre as conceived of by the State officials demand to be considered.

The Centre Group theatre may be said to be strongly influenced and shaped by the ideas and ideals of Lunacharsky, just as the Left Group theatre is by those of Meierhold and the Right Group theatre by those of Stanislavsky. But it reveals a great difference in manner and matter from either. In matter, Meierhold and his followers are as revolutionary as communism; in manner, as evolutionary as industrial science. They assume that the workers want to use the theatre for the purpose of constructing a working model of their new industrial world for which they are fighting, and they are helping them to build it as a rather wonderful machine of which the workers are the conscious parts. This is the new constructive stage technique. The worker-players are seen as parts of the machine, expressing its forms and movements as far as possible. The scenery, too, is designed to express industrial forms, highly condensed to fit the new theory of representation. The whole is intended to suggest that the mechanisation of industry, such as will take place in the New Russia, is a necessary introduction to the Leisure Life implicit in communistic theory. Stanislavsky's matter and manner are as revolutionary as stagecraft permits. He has nothing to do consciously with political or industrial propaganda. His sole business is with the propaganda of his own theatrical ideas, as may be seen by turning to the chapter on the subject of Stanislavsky's theatre. Taking these differences into consideration, as well as the fact of Lunacharsky's influence, it is permissible to speak of the Centre Group theatre as Lunacharsky's theatre.

We have seen that with the Revolution, the Soviet Government assumed control of all the theatres, the privately owned as well as the old imperial ones, and that some months later, in the person of the Minister of Education, Lunacharsky, they

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concentrated a good deal of their efforts at educational reform upon the theatre, hitherto devoted to the dissemination of bourgeois ideas. In the early days of the Revolution the idea took root that the theatre must be made not only a popular institution—that is, popular in the sense of being owned and managed by the people, but a place wherein the people might amuse themselves by absorbing communism and by playing at the realisation of communistic theories. Yet the changes prepared by and actually effected by the Government officials under the leadership of Lunacharsky were much more moderate and rational than those effected by certain men of the theatre who leaned heavily on the extreme Left. Indeed there is no doubt that the attitude of Lunacharsky and his educational party towards the theatre was as reverent as that of the ancient Greeks. There are positive resemblances between the State conception of the new Russian theatre and the conception of the ancient Greek theatre. Both rest on the idea of a popular theatre, both imply socialisation of the theatre, both are concerned with cultural-educational centres, and both are bound up with the establishment of a one-function theatre. By a one-function theatre is meant a theatre which stands for public service alone, not for public service and acquisitive gain, as is the case with the commercial theatre.

There is also an important difference to be noted. It is this difference which entitles the present Russian theatre to be called new. It deserves to be strongly emphasised because it really gives direction to all other differences between classical and contemporary—for instance, the German *Neue Freie Volksbühne*—popular theatres. If we study the ancient Greek and modern German theatres we shall find that the Greeks and the Germans are concerned with the problem of bringing the theatre to the people as a whole, and *vice versa*, irrespective of class, but in such a manner that the working class (or masses in Greek days) shall derive as much benefit from its educative and recreative power and importance as the middle and upper classes. Thus, the poorest person in the community would be assured of as ample a theatrical experience as the wealthiest one. But they are not concerned with the problem of bringing the stage and the drama to the people, and *vice versa*. Both the stage and the drama remain isolated from the people, the

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one as the playground of deputy players, the other as the product of deputy playwrights. They are, in fact, isolated in an aristocratic, intellectual, individualistic, æsthetic, or some other way from the people themselves. It is true that there are various projects for bringing the audience into the performance. But these do not affect the contention. The attempts to mix the people with the production, which Max Reinhardt has made, do not remove the isolation between the stage and the audience, the spectator and the professional player.

The fact remains that in early Greek times and during the Free theatre movement in Europe, nothing was written for the people or by the people. Plays were written by the intellectuals (or intelligentsia, as they are sometimes called), by the educated middle class, and a few by the upper class, who experienced life from a far different standpoint from which the masses experienced it. All through the Free theatre period, which sprang up in Germany many years ago and continued till the war stopped it, the intellectuals let themselves go on their favourite topics with a vengeance. Science, politics, psychology, biology, pathology, criminology, spiritualism, libertinism, and indeed all the intellectual problems of the modern world were dished up one after the other, and succeeded in putting a faint glow of interest in the minds of small cliques of intellectuals. But they left the masses icily cold. Even the drama of the dregs with which certain playwrights sought to interest the middle and upper classes in the hardships of the lower classes, was no better. It was simply composed of high-brow views, and opinions on low-brow psychology and economics. The writers of this stuff proposed to make accessible to the lower classes a vision of their struggle which the lower classes could not have, and to win for their plays an audience for which they were not meant.

Much the same might be said with regard to stage-craft. No better result was attained when frenzied reformers tore down the act-drop, removed the proscenium, and made the stage and auditorium one. They did not achieve the necessary unity. They did not put the masses in the front of the stage. All they did was to continue to advance those personalities who embodied intellectual problems and outlooks which have no value at all for the masses. Thus, though the action-place was

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pushed into the auditorium and the players made their exits and entrances, and moved freely among the spectators, even sat beside them and took them prisoners with the pungent odour of grease-paint, isolation remained. Every time the reform theatre was filled, and this may be stated as a general rule, it was filled with an audience two-thirds of whom were not active participants in the action of a play which was truly an unfolding of their inner life as they themselves experienced it, players in a dramatic experience of their own. They were either eager to watch a theatrical exhibition that flattered their intellect and vanities, like a present-day stage discussion, or curious to witness that sensationalism of matter and manner, especially scenic, which unfortunately has, of recent years, been allowed to enter the reform theatre disguised as theatrical advance.

The builders of the new Russian theatre are concerned with a far different problem, which may be called the new thing in the theatre. It is the problem of bringing the theatre to the workers and the workers to the theatre in such a way that they become a functional part of each other. The theatre must no longer resemble a deputy human body which goes through all the business of life while the real body sits idly watching the process. It must be the real body composed of those engines whose secrets still elude the theatrical biologists, the psychologists, and the physiologists, who, with all their skill, never succeed in quickening the human body and soul and keeping them together and alive in the theatre. The crowning glory of this real body is the brain, with its delicately adjusted mass of "operators and wires," so to speak, forming the organising and administrative master-contrivance of the body. Given a satisfactory solution to the problem the world will get for the first time in its history a theatre which is a masterpiece of functional correlation and social co-operation.

So the task to which Lunacharsky as a representative of the Soviet Government was committed was that of planning a theatre from which everybody and everything is excluded except the workers and their own dramatic experiences quickened by communism. It must contain no personalities, except the mass one, and no deputies. The people are to take the stage, and to let the world see them unfolding their wings

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under the communist touch, and the stage is to take the auditorium, as it were. This means that the whole theatre must be turned into a stage, and all the workers will be players. Which, when it is done, will be merely a demonstration of the truth of Shakespeare's observation that the world's a stage, and man and woman are merely players.

The original plan was a working-class or mass theatre springing directly out of the Revolution, and embodying those principles for which the Revolution was fought. Its aim was to encourage the workers to become their own authors, producers and actors; to exalt the anarcho-mass where the anarcho-individualist had been too long; to replace the culture of the cultured by the culture of the uncultured; in short, to destroy everything belonging to the bad old order in order to make way for everything belonging to the good new order.

Time and circumstances have interfered with the plan. The result is that instead of being realised by one group of organisers and administrators representing the Government, it is being realised by three groups representing the three parts into which the Government may be divided, Left, Centre, and Right. The three may be said to have a common plan, but not a common method. So the building of the workers' theatre occupies their attention in different ways. On the Left very deeply, in the Centre more soberly according to considerations of State, on the Right only as far as the irresistible current of events compel. The Right would like to break away from the working-class movement and return to bourgeois idealism. But a current has decidedly set in in the direction of a new working-class society. This is too strong for the Right, which must therefore either go with it or be drowned.

Each, then, is making its contribution to the original plan, each has building materials of its own. From the Centre Group comes the cultural-educational bricks and mortar necessary to awaken the class-consciousness of the workers, and to reveal to them the meaning and significance of their own ideology. The preparation for this section of the structure has been on well-defined lines of destruction and construction of a more or less traditional character. The latter is inevitable owing to the particular temperament, training and physique

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of the master-builder of the section. Lunacharsky, whose characteristics and contribution to the new theatre are described elsewhere, is mainly concerned with the theatre's cultural-educational and civic purpose, and therefore reveals a traditionalist or conservative tendency by selecting masterpieces and methods of the past, preferring, of course, those with a present political and social meaning and significance. This in its way exercises a formative influence upon the Russian character, which, as Lunacharsky wisely understands, can only be built up in the new way by starting at the foundation of primitive instincts, impulses, and emotions. It is also his method of theatre building.

Lunacharsky's plan, as originally conceived, was to build a cultural-educational theatre—a theatre devoted to the cultural development of the workers, and to the making of citizens. Moreover, it was to be a theatre in whose work only the workers and their sympathisers shall take part. The plan was not an easy one to realise. It meant removing the existing human and material cultural resources and replacing them with others which were practically unrealised. It meant indeed ridding the theatre of its bourgeois cumber, and leaving very little except an empty structure to be adapted to the new purpose. Furthermore, it meant that this old and impossible structure, composed of all the established playhouses, must be used in an entirely new way. For there was no time or money for the purpose of destroying it, as a well-known Italian actress once demanded that the theatre should be destroyed, and building an entirely new one capable of fulfilling the function of a theatre of Popular Culture based strictly on Marxism. Properly speaking, the theatre demands a new form if it is to be an instrument for initiating the workers into the truth of Marxism. The old or existing form is a bourgeois or commercial one. The man who put a wall round the stage in Elizabethan times did so to make money. Now every brick proclaims aloud a bourgeois ideology. Every brick of the conventional theatre is reactionary, so to speak. The same objection applies to the millionaires' palaces in which the Russian workers have established their clubs and stages. They embody the millionaire reactionary spirit. They breathe it on the workers, and probably exert as powerful an influence on them as disembodied spirits are said to do

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on the unsuspecting. Any psychologist will tell you as much.

There is no need to enlarge on the difficulties. They must be plain to everyone who has the slightest notion of what Russia has gone through since 1917. In spite of them, the building of the cultural-educational theatre has been upon well-defined lines of destruction and construction. Facts to prove this are fairly numerous. Among them are the following taken from official sources.<sup>1</sup>

There was, as already stated, no change at first. The earliest policy of the Soviet Government was one of non-interference. They left things alone, to be developed by circumstances. "The People's Commissary of Education, Lunacharsky, is himself a writer and playwright of considerable reputation; and he realised fully that it is necessary, in art, for any new movement or general tendency to develop its strength in free combat and contrast with the forms and 'philosophies' of art that it is striving to supplant. The Commissariat for Education, having taken over the nationalised theatres, brought them within the reach of all classes of the community. It gave over into the hands of the theatrical workers themselves the task of choosing the plays, ballets, and operas to be performed. It gave them complete control over method of production as well as repertory. And then it left the various movements to develop or to die without interference or constraint." It should be said that this choice and control was subject to the approval of Kel's Committee, to which reference has already been made.

The first essential change in the making of a popular culture theatre was that of converting the established theatre into a free or one-function theatre by the elimination of money and the introduction of tickets. The commercial idea—the idea that the theatre was originally built and supported by gold, that gold purchased everything—plays, actors, scenery, had to be overcome, and its evils swept away. So the motive of profit was eliminated as far as possible. Regarding the ticket system, we are told "in some theatres almost all tickets—at one time, at least—were distributed through the trade unions. In others the Government departments issued the bulk of the

<sup>1</sup> "Russian Information and Review."

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tickets to their employers, many of whom, of course, were from the better educated sections of the people. At one or two theatres almost all the tickets were sold in the ordinary way, but the prices were very low, and the theatres received supplies, and, if necessary, a subsidy from the Government."

The essential second change, that of making a popular culture audience, was brought about by the first. "The theatres (owing to the free and low price ticket system) were certain of an audience; for the Russian people are intensely appreciative of art in any form, and no war or revolution could so occupy them as to make them lose interest in the stage."

The third essential change, that of making popular culture players out of unpopular materials, took place as follows.

"The Russian stage inherited from the Tsarist regime a peculiarly cultured class of artistes. The theatre used to be dominated by the nobility and the 'intelligentsia'—a class peculiar to Russia in its aloofness from the rest of the people and the vitality of its artistic interests. Commercialism did not deeply affect the Russian stage; the 'revue' was not known there; the average Russian theatre was as different from the average British or American one as the 'corps de ballet' is from the 'beauty-chorus.'

"It might have been expected that the Russian actors and actresses would have chosen to go on playing the tragedies that showed the soul of Russia before the Revolution, the comedies inspired by Parisian influences, or those dramas of personal relations, ironic and rather bitter, which had made the reputation of the great Russian playwrights of the last century, men like Tchekov and Andreiev. But all actors know and desire the response of an audience; its imaginative sympathy helps them not only to finer work, but to the fullest enjoyment of their work, while even the greatest play seems to fall flat if the audience is out of tune with it in thought or feeling. And it was this responsive sympathy that the Russian players set themselves to arouse." Here we have the new actor as the result of the new audience. Apparently the appeal to public feeling is one whose response it is not easy to despise. A good

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many actors left Russia soon after the Revolution rather than appear in revolutionary plays. Those that remained, of course, preferred to appear in plays that called forth sympathy from the audience.

So we come to the fourth essential change, the making of popular culture plays. As regards this matter it seems that at first the type of play was not changed. The difficulties attending the Revolution and immediate after events "forbade any attempt to produce new plays and made impossible the growth of any coherent movement." But later, when the distribution of theatre tickets had been organised, and the theatre knew what sort of audience to expect, when the material difficulties of supply and lighting had to some extent been overcome, and all those whose work was in any way connected with the theatre could rely on some sort of rations and supply of necessities—they were given certain privileges as to housing and a ration of food higher than that of the majority of the people in the city—when this had been achieved, the artistes and those interested in the artistic side of the theatre began to get together and form their own managing committees, repertory committees, and "critical councils."

With these theatrical "soviets" at work, there followed a process of elimination. "In the life of post-revolutionary Russia there was pity and terror enough, and all the stark material of tragedy—except despair. Those who despaired of Russia were of no use to her in a time of reconstruction and struggle; some of them left a country whose development they could neither help nor understand; the remainder ceased to affect its life in any way save as a dead weight to be carried, so many mouths to be fed. The men whose lives lay in the open fields or amongst the great machines, into whose hands the future of the country had passed, had no sympathy with the drama of the 'middle emotions,' the psychology—or pathology—of the discontent in little and rather meaningless lives. A high wall hid them from the shadowed paths of 'the Cherry Orchard,' and its blossoms were too brittle for the times in which they lived. The first suggestions and experiments took the form of melodrama. It was felt that the naive and exaggerated emotions, the action and the incident of melo-

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drama, would suit the new audience. Later, and for much the same reason, came romantic plays."

The fifth and final change was that effected by the changes in the population. The revolution had affected every side of life; the whole country, its philosophy and its religion, its conception of the present and its hope for the future was changing. And, of course, as time went on the workers would put on different characteristics and exhibit different moods harmonising with the different trends of thought and action. It could not be expected that they would remain as stationary as in Tsarist times.

In poetry and literature we have an instance of changing periods. In its early days the Revolution presented itself to many established and unestablished authors who had remained in Russia in a romantic garb. In the old days they had sung about it, even invited it to come. When it came they were disposed to follow the example of Alexander Blok, the well-known poet, by regarding it as "holy banditry," and investing the revolutionaries with the nimbus of a Saint Bandit whose purpose it was to deprive Russia not of its great national virtues, but of its foulness of life. They placed Russia, indeed, on the crest of Calvary, crucified between two robbers. The task of the bandits was to take down the body and conduct it with fitting ritual to a deified resurrection. As a consequence of this mood, poets and other authors poured forth a lot of pseudo-revolutionary stuff designed to clothe these quaint romantic ideas.

The romantic period was followed by a realistic one. In the first days of the Revolution the poets—symbolists, futurists, imagists, &c.—while the novelty was upon them, entered their ivory tower and sang of deliverance and the rest of it. But presently came civil war and famine and economic privation, which overturned their romantic tower and left them struggling for existence with the mass of the people. So in the first year of the Revolution, poets and authors became split into two camps. The pseudo-revolutionary ones—Blok, Kuliev, Andreiev, and others—who could not change their conception of the Revolution, turned tail and fled. Others who had caught the true significance of the Revolution remained and became associated with the new body of workers in forms of social

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service, including the theatre. Caught in the wave of real events, they very quickly substituted realistic-expressionism for false romanticism.

Then came a third period when the workers and their co-operators, finding themselves released from the overwhelming exactions of civil war, turned to the serious but more congenial business of rebuilding industrial and economic life. The poets and other creative minds among them very quickly conceived a new form of expression suited to the main purpose. To this they gave the name of "constructivism." In the theatre the aim of "construction" is to replace the principles of painting by those of engineering. The effect of "construction" is to indicate not merely an end to be attained but a certain suitability in the means employed to attain the end. The idea has caught on, and to-day it is working through all the new institutions, particularly the theatre. The tendency is fully considered in the chapters on the various theatres.

These "periods" reflected themselves in the theatre of cultural-education in spite of its traditional attitude. Lunacharsky has never welcomed violent reforms in plays, acting, scenery, &c., preferring matter and manner that appealed to the primitive instincts of the new audience to high-brow experiments which were above its head. His own contributions have been of a traditional character, of course, strongly touched by his Marxian preferences. Two, at least, of his plays, "Cromwell" and "The People," exhibited new ideas and theories in old forms. "Cromwell" was an attempt to read up-to-date revolutionary tendencies in the Protector. "The People" was an epic drama in spectacle form. Its five acts covered the history of the world from "before religion" till "after revolution."

These plays are said to have widened the split in the camp of poets, painters, and others concerning the art forms of the future. The revolutionaries refused to have anything to do with the pre-occupation with form manifested by the classicists. They stated their belief that form did not matter; content was the thing. If sufficiently important, it would put on its own form, expressionist, futurist, or any other. The classicists would have none of this. They stood for the "essential

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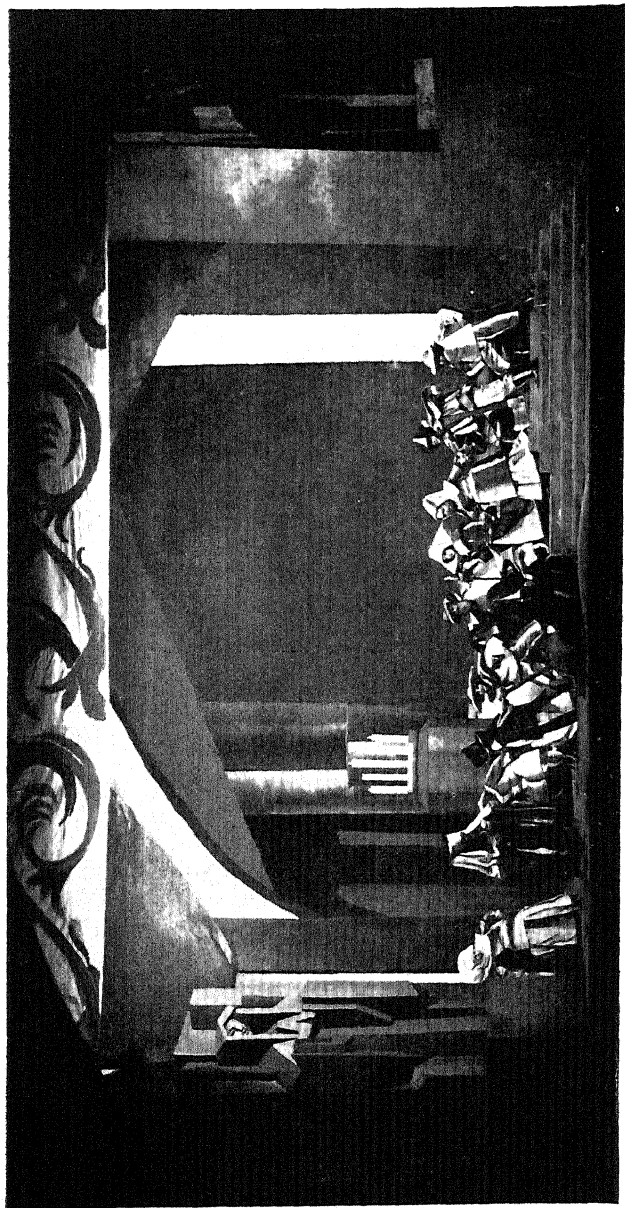
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traditions of the theatre intact." They contended that the theatre stood for form. It was outside social reform, politics, and the rest of the dreary pulpit stuff. It was sufficient unto itself. In their view the task of the theatre was to "influence and to educate the masses of the people to an appreciation of the great work of the past, the work that had lived. Only when the people understood, and were in sympathy with past achievements, could any group of artistes go forward, with the certainty that their work would receive intelligent criticism and appreciation, and with the inspiration of the active and creative understanding of their audiences."

Of course, against this went the obstinate opinion that politics were the life blood of the New Russia. They were absolutely necessary to the development of the people. It was the changes wrought by politics on the life of the people that mattered. Unless artists and writers could take their eyes off the past and fix them on the present; unless they could share the sacrifice of the people, could live their lives, share their dreams and fears, they would be of no value.

This was sufficient to modify the classical current and to cut off certain historical streams as shewn elsewhere. And it opened the cultural-educational theatre to the new streams of stage-craft, realistic-expressionist, and constructionist, which kept it abreast of the times. A very good instance of Lunacharsky's theatre going through this metamorphosis, so to speak, is afforded by his defence of the production of "Carmen" at the Moscow Art theatre. It appears that he found himself in radical disagreement with the views on this production of the dramatic critic of the "Isvestia."<sup>1</sup> Accordingly he explains the production from his own point of view." After referring to the needs and sufferings of the theatre staff working under extremely difficult conditions, he asks, "What does 'Carmen' give?" He examines the path of stage-craft in the European theatre, and finds it has left the "left wing revolt against 'mimicry and realism,' and has taken up a middle position by compromising with the two points of view. How does this agree with the task of the theatre? What is the task of the theatre? To him it is not photography. It is the

<sup>1</sup> Moscow "Isvestia," June 2nd, 1922.



THE KAMERNY THEATRE: MOSCOW.

*Blagoveshchenia*. Neo-realism. The scene shows an application of M. Tairov's theory of neo-realistic unity. To attain this unity he has invented a new stage, a system of body and brain disciplined acting, and a new form of scenery. But it is a neo-realistic theatre without new plays. Experiments are confined to classics and modern plays of enduring quality.



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representation of life in terms of a theatre. In other words, theatricality. It is not to study Spain from the life and to



State Choreographic Studio Dance Movement Designs from the  
Ballet *Arlekin*

present it actually on the stage, but " to observe the manifestations of life, to represent somehow its pulse, its essence,

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translating life freely into theatrical forms." He is obviously referring to a form of expressionism. With "pure expressionism" he will have nothing to do. The aim of "pure expressionists" is to break completely with reality (meaning actuality). Like all creative artists, they seek and are entitled to make their own world. But it is a formless and absolutely incomprehensible world. "It has nothing in common with humanity." These pure expressionists say nothing because they have nothing to say. He glances at the attempt of Tairov, the director of the Moscow Kamerny theatre, to establish a non-representational form of expression, and dismisses it with a gesture of impatience as "beyond all limits of absurdity and paradox."

Having cleared the approaches to "Carmen" in this way, Lunacharsky fires off a definition of realistic-expressionism, the thing which in his belief the stage needs nowadays. It is a "realism that is native and familiar to us in all its determinants, and at the same time is unusual, constructed, so to speak, entirely in the new harmony, at the pitch of modern ideas and emotions." Dealing with the production itself he remarks, "It was not by accident, if perhaps unconsciously, that the Grand theatre chose 'Carmen' for its first step in the direction of operatic reform. This opera lends itself better than any other to impressionist realism, for that was its form when it left Bizet's hands. It is, therefore, ridiculous to reproach Fedorovsky and Sanin (the decorator and producer) for not giving us Spain as she is. They give us an idealised Spain, the Spain of Bizet, and one must be simply blind not to feel the power of Fedorovsky's decorations for the first, second, and fourth acts. Thanks to these decorations, the opera moves before us like some beautiful and terrible creature—like a tiger. It was, of course, difficult to put the same power into the music, instrumental and vocal, and get from sound the same compelling impressions as from colour. Nevertheless harmony was achieved; the interpretation carried us out into the Mediterranean sunlight—Spain, mid-day."

As for Sanin, "he took this *mêlodrama* and made it more and more tense from situation to situation; the meetings on the piazza, the sun and the crowds, the squalid tavern, and the



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old tunes of the past; then the tearing storm of passion. Then came the sun again, the singing, holiday-making, sensuous crowds—and the murder.” Fedorovsky’s costumes, too, “displayed astonishing richness,” beyond anything seen even in Paris. In short, realistic-expressionism achieved amazing effects in colour, sound, movement and emotion. The production of “Carmen” may be reckoned among the best given at the State theatres. Productions at the Small theatre and the Big theatre, Moscow, the Mariansky theatre, Petrograd, and other subsidised theatres could be described in detail, but nothing would be added to the information contained in Lunacharsky’s explanation. I remember seeing a performance of “Lohengrin” at the Big (Bolshoi) theatre. It struck me as being one of the most picturesque productions from the realistic-expressionist point of view I had ever seen. It was a magnificent example of stage pageantry designed to reproduce the legendary atmosphere in which the opera is set. The scenes passed before one like a succession of old German paintings, rich in form and colour, and composed of masses of early German figures, knights, soldiers, dames, children, citizens, etc., in impressively striking costumes, and moving amid a perfect forest of halberds, spears, bannerets, and symbolical devices of all kinds, and against a rayonnist background, that is, a background resembling the brilliant multi-coloured rays of the sun. The handling of the crowds in the big scenes was certainly masterly. And the decorative effect of some of the scenes, especially the last act with its arrangement of big coloured curtains with the centre divided off into a canopied chamber containing a splendid coloured couch, was extremely effective. But the production was not beyond criticism. On the whole, it was too much of a kaleidoscopic mass, lacking simplicity, unity and continuity. The coloured light that was thrown on the scenes was too diffused. It embraced everybody. I did not like the new method of putting the principals in turn in the centre of the stage upon a raised platform, where they resembled nothing so much as speakers at a political meeting. Still the whole thing was breath-taking, and, added to the gorgeous and harmonious interior of the Big theatre, no doubt it fulfilled its purpose of exercising a powerful influence on the plainly dressed, but enthusiastic

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audience that packed the mighty auditorium from floor to roof.

If stage-craft advance in the form of realistic-expressionism set its mark on "Lohengrin," something even more revolutionary appeared in the scenery for Wagner's "Rienzi." Here a treatment that was more Left wing than the home of classic opera had ever known, presented itself in the form of the circus ideas with which the Proletcult theatre had definitely associated itself. The scene, as designed by the painter, Yikylov, was shaped like a circus-arena with steps at all angles and all levels, with suggestions of a trapeze and hoops and the rest of the objects and agents of circus representation. What these aids to opera really mean is not quite clear. Probably they are meant to enable singers to make their highest flights as song birds. In the dramatic theatre they are considered essential aids to acting. It may be that the introduction of the circus to the opera is by way of a decorative appendage, although the new men of the Russian theatre have sworn to rid the theatre entirely of "decoration" as such. Or it may be that need of modernising the opera in accordance with the more natural and reasonable taste of the time, by removing cumbersome and idiotic machinery devised by Wagner and the pretentious and unreal effects devised by other composers and producers, has opened the door to other extremes. At any rate, side by side with the retention of classical operas has gone reforms of a sort. These include the nationalisation of music, the repopularisation of folk music under Lunacharsky and Laurie; the emphasising of communist elements in operas in Moscow and Petrograd, and the selection of operas that make an appeal, however remote, to the revolutionary spirit. Does not "Lohengrin" do so? That is what some of the war-time critics of Wagner meant when they accused his music-dramas of being responsible for the Great War. Further, there has been the reconstruction of the State orchestra by Kuper and Serge Kasewitsky, a renaissance of the State Ballet, and the introduction of a new system of musical education.

Many reliable foreign eye-witnesses have testified to the quality of the work carried on in Lunacharsky's theatre. Seeing that this evidence is reasonable, we may set beside

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it the words of Paul Scheffer, editor of the "Berliner Tageblatt," that "Moscow is the Mecca of theatrical forms of art."



The State Ballet Costume Design.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *THE CENTRE GROUP (Continued)*

#### (ii) THE KAMERNY (CHAMBER) THEATRE

**B**ELONGING to the Centre Group are theatres which differ from the State theatres in certain respects. These are the Kamerny, known abroad as the Moscow Kamerny; the Jewish Central, known as the Jewish Kamerny; and the Old Jewish (or Gabima) theatres. They are conceived of as centres of experiment with new technical theories and ideas, and the application of others with which the Moscow Art theatre has identified itself, and not as a means to influence and educate the workers to an appreciation of the communist life. At the same time they stand for a certain form of political propaganda. The two Jewish theatres, for instance, lay particular emphasis on the importance of the Jew and his philosophy, religion, modes of living and expression. Like the State theatre directly under Lunacharsky, they cling to the traditional in matter. In manner they partly continue the Right Group traditions, and partly apply the Left Group principles in seeking to develop a curious blend of symbolic and revolutionary method. Acting, for instance, reveals the gymnastic and circus acrobatic characteristics, described elsewhere, as manifested by the Left Group.

The Chamber theatre, sometimes spoken of as the Moscow Kamerny theatre, has distinct characteristics of its own which deserve examination in detail. This theatre's company have recently, for the first time, been on tour in Western Europe. Its directors are anxious to bring it to England. Its theories and work have been much discussed in the French and German Press, but not much has been said with regard to its place in the general theatrical movement in Russia to-day, and this

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probably for the reason that critics outside Russia have no means of ascertaining what is taking place in the Russian theatre and the present unified form of this theatre. They depend for instruction and information on the performances of isolated companies and on the literature published by their directors. The Kamerny theatre company have been accompanied by a fair quantity of explanatory books and "throw-aways." The director, Alexander Tairov, has himself written a great deal on his own theories and practice. He has kept strictly to these, and said nothing about the place his theatre occupies in the general scheme of the new Russian theatre. The result is that his theories and practice are difficult to understand, and are generally misunderstood by critics outside Russia, who, know nothing of the movements inside Russia of which they are the outcome, and which exercise a strong influence on the Kamerny theatre. It may be said here that all the theatres in Moscow are bound by common interests imposed upon them by the Revolution and subsequent events. Accordingly they act and react on each other in such a way that it is necessary to study them as a whole and compare their theories and practice in order to understand each separately. For instance, the Kamerny theatre, original though its methods appear to be, is actually related both to the Left and the Right Group. Seen in association with the Left, its "acrobatic" acting and use of levels are easier to understand. But seen apart from this influence and that of the Moscow Art theatre, the extraordinary characteristics of its acting, stage, and scenery are apt to be obscured by a cloud of misconception and of explanatory metaphysico-æsthetic verbiage.

The simple truth with regard to the Kamerny theatre is that, like all the leading theatres in Russia to-day, it stands for acting first, and for the principle that everything must proceed from the acting. This principle is accepted and applied by the Left, Centre, and Right Groups. In consequence all three are engaged on a common problem, how to obtain the maximum degree of acting from the actor. Logically arising from this problem is a second, how to attain a unity of all the objects and agents of interpretation and representation so as to confer the maximum degree of expression and power of communication on acting. And from this comes also, logically,

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a third problem, how to unite the stage and auditorium so that nothing prevents the spectator from receiving the maximum degree of expression.

But while the Left Group theatres without exception affirm the second and third problem, some of the Centre and Right Group theatres deny it. They are not concerned with the problems of communication and unity of stage and auditorium. Thus though there is a general search for unity, it takes different paths in the new Russian theatre. Different forms emerge. Meierhold is concerned with one form, uniting the audience with the action of the play, through the identity of this action with their own experiences. Tairov is concerned with another, uniting the objects and agents of interpretation and representation with the spirit of the play, through the identity of this abstraction with a similar abstraction evoked from the actor. In one case the world on the stage is carried into the auditorium. In the other it is not. Stanislavsky is concerned with a third, uniting all on the stage through their identity with its facts of actual life. The spectators are shown likenesses of themselves and their surroundings. In this case there is no compulsion to unite with the action on the stage. They are even invited to remain separate, for they retain their free will, and can take sides if they like. In the case of Meierhold's form of unity there is no free will, spectators are drawn irresistibly into the action of the play.

The history of the Kamerny theatre is a comparatively short one, if we leave out of account the long line of theories of the theatre and dramatic communication from which it has undoubtedly derived a great deal. It is really a war theatre, opened in December, 1914. But its founders, Alexander Yakovlevitch Tairov, the director, and his wife, Alice Koonen, a Swede, the leading actress, began their joint work a year or two earlier. Tairov was originally intended for the bar. Doubtless his legal training had something to do with the severely logical and disciplined form of stage unity which he seeks to realise. He abandoned law for the theatre, and it was not very long before he decided to leave the theatre for ever. In 1913 he met Mardjanoff, who at this time had the "Free theatre." Mardjanoff invited Tairov to join him, and to produce a pantomime. Tairov accepted, and began to work

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out his new theories. The Free theatre, however, had to close owing to the failure of rich subscribers to continue their support. Tairov and his company continued their work without money. They took a club house in Tverskoy Boulevard, and began to prepare "Sakantula." Tairov then went abroad to study the performance of this play. He returned to Moscow late in 1914, where he continued his work under great difficulties. On December 12th he and his company produced "Sakantula" with much success. It may be that his visit abroad to study the ideas in "Sakantula" brought him into touch with the Indian brain-and-body system of discipline, which he has ever since applied to acting. Some well-to-do people came forward to support him by becoming shareholders. A board of directors was formed, including Tairov and Alice Koonen, his wife, and the Kamerny theatre was born. For three years he and his company struggled for existence. In February, 1917, the Kamerny theatre closed owing to lack of money. It re-opened in the winter of 1917-18, just after the Revolution had taken place. Since then it has not looked back. Subsequently Nikolai Tseretelli, Tairov's leading actor, joined the board. Both Alice Koonen and Tseretelli are Moscow Art theatre trained players, and probably they are responsible for some of the influence which this theatre has exercised over the Kamerny theatre.

What are the theories which Tairov conceived so early in his career, and which he considered so new and so difficult to realise that he almost gave up the theatre in despair? In the first place he conceived of the theatre as a means of expressing a new form of unity resting on æsthetic and metaphysical ideas, to which he gives the name of neo-Realism. Accordingly he calls his theatre the theatre of neo-Realism. The theatre is to be an instrument for expressing a new synthesis, a new spirit of rhythmic harmony. It requires for the purpose three things:—

1. A new type of actor.
2. A new form of stage.
3. A new style of scenic environment

Hence arise three theories:—

1. A new system of acting.
2. A new construction of the stage.
3. A new scenic atmosphere.

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It will be noticed that the question of general theatre construction is omitted. And it will be found that in place of proposals to build a theatre suited to the new ideas, there is the ingenious proposal of transferring the auditorium levels to the stage. It is assumed that the present, even the most advanced, design of sloping auditorium and entirely flat stage exclude correct sight lines. A remedy appears in transferring the auditorium inclines to the stage in the form of different levels attained by stairs, platforms, and other devices. So there will be no further need to bother about the incline of the rows of seats, and there will be no need to request ladies not to wear hats and not to dress their hair flower-pot fashion.

How do these theories dispose of the four main agents of dramatic communication, the theatre, the play, the actor and the auditor? In Tairov's view, "the theatre is the theatre. It is a self-evident proposition that the true way to enable the theatre to find itself is to theatricalise the theatre." The play? He does not say anything about that except to indicate that it is somewhere bound up with the objects and agents of interpretation. "The actor is the centre of the theatre." What should the actor really be? Tairov makes him the master actor, and places the ballet in front of him as an example to be followed. "As there is a corp-de-ballet so there should be a corp-de-drama." These are his very words! "The spectator shall not take an active part. Taking an active part is destructive, not constructive. His relation to the theatre shall be his relation to Life. He shall receive creatively what the theatre has to give him." Tairov means he shall be receptive only.

Tairov puts the actor and acting first in his scheme of theatrical reconstruction. In his book<sup>1</sup> "Zapiski Rejissera" ("Notes of a stage director") he explains at great length the process of reconstruction. The actor is the seed of the new synthesis. He must be a super-actor. In himself and his productive energy, or "creative" energy, as Tairov would say, are contained the material, the means and the conditions for the creative act which is the essence of acting, and which sets up the particular synthesis which Tairov has in mind, that is, the unity of the theatre and all it contains.

<sup>1</sup> "Zapiski Rejissera," Alexander Tairov (Moscow).



## THE KAMERNY THEATRE

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How is this actor-seed fertilised and brought to creative fruition? How does the actor become creative? It seems that creation is entirely an inner process. The actor's motive powers are all from within. His sensibility and imitative powers are the source and spring of creation. His bodily organs are the conductors which are actuated by his sensibility and imitative power. In Tairov's words, "You are an actor, *you* (your I) are the creative personality who thinks over and realises the production of your creative act. You (your body, arms, legs, head, voice, speech), represent the material (or means?) with which you create. You (your muscles, joints, etc.), are your instruments. And you (that is, all your individuality realised in the stage image), appear in the result which is born from this creative process." "All-you, all-in-you and all-through-you." Here there is a rather crude separation of the I (individuality) from the You (the personality) or of the Alexander from the Tairov. It seems that the I is the thing to be created, while the You is the instrument of creation.

But this metaphysical jargon does not help us to understand the meaning of the actor and of his work. An immoderate use of metaphysical terms in connection with the theatre simply makes us drowsy and unfit to handle its pressing practical problems. However, let us examine Tairov's æsthetic metaphysical receipt for producing the creative act and making the new synthesis.

There are two processes concerned with the creative act. 1—The actor gets an inner perception of the image to be created. 2—He clothes himself outwardly with the image. By so doing, he communicates it to the spectator. Therefore, there are two techniques, an interior and exterior, or inner and outer one. They are concerned with what might be termed image seeking and finding. The inner technique has three movements. 1—The first movement, the determination of the image cannot be regulated. There are no rules. It is spontaneous, and one might say the first act of improvisation. The producer can help, but each actor has his own way of finding the image. 2—The second movement begins when the image is found. Then commences the preparation for its final appearance. All sorts of agents, the other actors, the elements of the play, operate

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upon it and help to shape it. 3—This movement brings the image to its final stage. Thus the "fundamental emotion," whatever it be, joy, sorrow, fear, etc., is transformed into a creative image under pressure of which the actor must act.

So, "in the development of the creative will and creative fantasy, and in the possibility of forming an image at any given moment and thereafter of controlling the emotions, lies the function of the inner technique."

And it seems this function is bound up with improvisation. First, improvisation of the image, and then improvisation of its activities. Something has to be seized by the actor and improvised into an image capable of communicating itself creatively. There are, according to Tairov, three schools of improvisation. "1—The Naturalistic theatre teaches the actor to deal with the objective world of the actualist stage. 2—The Conditional theatre teaches the actor to deal with the spectator. 3—The Synthetic theatre synthesises the two and teaches the actor to deal with his fellow-actor, while remembering that there is a spectator." The three kinds of improvisation are apparently objective, objective-subjective, and purely subjective. In the latter case the actor improvises on himself—the I.

Then we arrive at the exterior technique. It appears to be bound up with a Yoga-like training of Will and Consciousness, the main thing being concentration. Tairov compares the actor with the painter and sculptor. He tells us that the latter have to work on dead materials, whereas the actor has to work on himself. Also that the painter can abate his creative ardour, so to speak, and stop work whenever he feels inclined without interfering with the final effect, whereas the actor must keep on from the moment of vision to the moment when he has communicated his vision. To take a common instance, he cannot break off in the middle of a scene which he is acting before the spectator and resume when he likes.

Exterior technique is concerned with the means with which the actor communicates his creative image. He has to work with his body and voice. These must be trained till they are completely under the actor's control. The essential training is that provided by a combination of the methods of the ballet and the circus. He must possess the control and the freedom of the ballet dancer, the acrobatic and juggler.

## THE KAMERNY THEATRE

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In Tairov's view, acting is an art form because the true actor has absolute control over the material, means and conditions which originate a creative act. He meets the argument that acting is not an art form, because control of material and means is rendered impossible by emotion, with the contention that proper training gives the needed control. He takes the trapeze performer as an instance, and observes that this performer is always possessed of the emotions inspired by the thoughts of death. That is, he is always possessed by fear and its system of emotions. If he can control these emotions, and even replace them by the play-impulse, he can control anything.

The same argument applies to the voice. The actor's voice is capable of perfect control, so that he can do practically anything he likes with it, changing swiftly from speech to song, from a low note to a high one.

"As the body gives the inner image in plastic form, so the voice gives it in phonetic form." For this, two essentials are required. 1—The voice must be in rhythmic harmony with the created image. 2—Speech must be dynamic, and be capable of producing its own "mis-en-scene." As an instance of the successful effect of harmony of voice and image, Tairov mentions the production of "Stenka Rasin" in 1919. Although the public did not understand what was said owing to the curious arrangement of the words, the harmony of the movement of the voice and the image was such that they thoroughly enjoyed the play.

The synthetic creative actor weaves an environment out of himself as a spider does a web. In plain talk, he requires a particular form of stage and scenery. This is dealt with by Tairov under the title of "Scenic Atmosphere." First of all, he analyses the forms of the stage used to obtain "atmosphere." In modern times there have been two outstanding forms, "the naturalistic and the conditional." The first was concerned with the actual representation of objects, the second with their spirit and style. The first had three dimensions, the second had two. The first was a model of actual life, the second was a sketch in which the actor was pressed into a relief against a flat background.

Being dissatisfied with the "model" of the "naturalistic

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theatre and the 'sketch' of the conditional," Tairov set to work to construct something different. He found that the actor has three dimensions, and the synthetic theory demanded that all sides of him should be seen. He must be shown not in the flat, but in the round. Not as a painting, but as a piece of sculpture. This made a return to the model stage necessary, but not in the old form. The new form must take into consideration the nature and extent of the stage, because the stage is really a part of the technique of the synthetic actor.

The first principle, then, was to make the form of the stage suitable for the purpose of showing the actor in three dimensions. This meant that the stage must not be flat, but have levels. "Make certain movements on the flat stage, then add a level. Immediately the movements become richer and fuller and more varied. Add more levels, and an endless variety of movements arises."

Thus we reach the next principle, namely, that all the levels of the auditorium, the inclines of the seats, must be transferred to the stage, so that the sight lines in all parts of the auditorium are absolutely correct and no part of the actor or his work is lost.

The third principle, and a very important one, is that of rhythm. As the aim of the production is to express the fundamental rhythm of the actor, the stage must be constructed according to this requirement. Tairov gives two examples. First, there is the Madonna descending from Heaven by means of steps arranged to represent rhythmical intervals. The steps correspond to musical intervals of one-quarter and one-eighth. Second, there is the scene representing an orgy which presents a different rhythmic problem. The different levels must be connected by different rhythms expressing different emotions. Thus the actor descending steps with rungs arranged to represent four beats to the bar would express something different from the actor descending steps with eight beats. An actor jumping from one level to another sets up different oscillations and different wave lengths of movement, so to speak. All of which seems to bear some relation to wireless telegraphy.

From the horizontal construction, with its different levels for different rhythms, Tairov turns to the vertical construction. In this he proposes to add height to the stage and the scenery

## THE KAMERNY THEATRE

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in such a way that the surroundings would have an harmonious relation to the actor and accord with the spirit of his rhythmic creation. Architecturally speaking, the vertical structures must always be to the scale of the actor, thus helping the acting and producing an effect on the spectator. If the actor is to appear very big, then the vertical structures must appear very small and the reverse.

In this way and with these principles, Tairov works towards a realisation of his conception of the three-dimensional stage. It is important to note one striking difference between the old three-dimensional "model" and the new. The old one was designed to produce an illusion of actual life. The new one aims to provide rhythmic and plastic aids to acting. It is designed to complete the actor as the snail's shell completes the edible it contains. Tairov's scenic forms are derived from the simple primitive geometric forms of the crystal. They offer endless combinations without producing the illusion of actual life. So we find the new three-dimensional stage filled with volumes, cubic, pyramidal, circular, conic, square, rectangular, etc., in form. These forms are said to be suited to, and indeed evoked by, the rhythmic harmony created by the actor. To Tairov everything in the three-dimensional theatre is real from the point of view of true acting and true environment; in a word, from the true theatre. Therefore, he calls his theatre the Neo-Realistic theatre.

During the recent Continental tour of the Kamerny theatre company, very much was written in the Press concerning their performances. But very little or nothing was said about the theories which the performances are supposed to illustrate. The reason is simple. The plays which this company are performing are classics and well-known modern plays. The form which Tairov confers upon each in accordance with his particular conception of its spirit, is not that which the critics are accustomed to. As a result, the latter are so bewildered that they either remain silent concerning the form, or deal with the quality of a detail as it appears to them. Thus Mr. Philip Carr, a correspondent of the London "Observer," was struck by what he termed the acrobatic character of the acting in one play. As to the theory and formula upon which the production rested,

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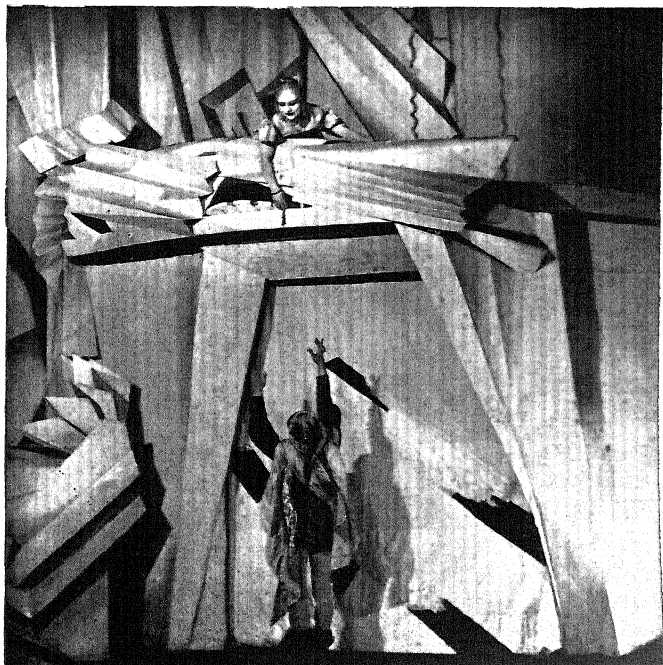
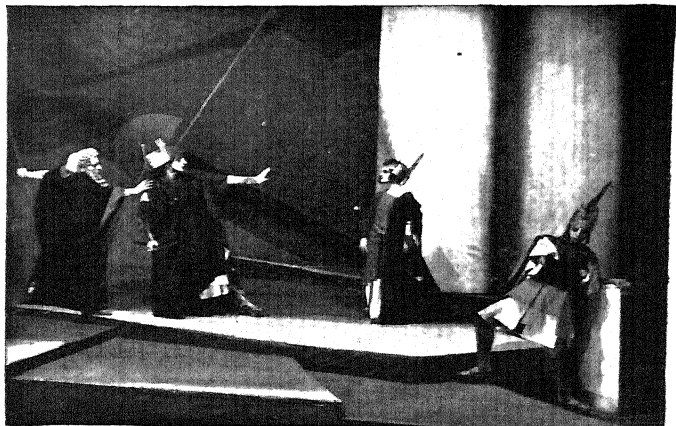
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Tairov's conception of the material, means and conditions of the rhythmic synthesis by which he sought to obtain a dramatic communication, these things quite escaped Mr. Carr altogether. Tairov would be wise to illustrate his theories by an entirely new form of play. Probably he cannot find one.

I have seen several of the productions in Moscow, Berlin, Paris, and elsewhere. At Moscow the theatre building is a large house which has been converted to theatrical purposes. The auditorium and stage are contained in a spacious and tasteful chamber, with rows of inclining seats and no galleries. There is nothing conspicuous about the auditorium or the stage-opening. The latter has an act-drop with a big and arresting design, and a scheme of black and gold by Miss Alexander Exter, who, with Vesnin and Jakoulov, shares the honour of being principal decorators at this theatre. This curtain, like others that lay behind it, has doubtless been designed to introduce the spectator to the things that are to follow. If so, then the impression he receives of the coming feast is of a rich, very elaborate, and highly indigestible fare. Simplicity is certainly not its key-note. As to unity and continuity they may be present, but if so they are not easy to find. This curtain does in a way prepare one for both satisfaction and disappointment.

On the whole, I enjoyed the productions which I witnessed. They certainly revealed a serious attempt to cover untrodden ground. At the same time, I was tormented by a powerful objection. It first appeared at the sight of "*Girofle-Girofla*." The piece was a French operetta, which had been written under one set of circumstances and adapted to another, and entirely different set. I felt that the spirit of the work had been altered, and what Tairov gave me was not "*Girofle-Girofla*," but Alexander Tairov. It was the same with other pieces. I asked for Hoffmann, Oscar Wilde, Shakespeare, or Molière, and I received Tairov, Alice Koonen, Tseretelli, and the rest. The objection I had was to the disharmony produced by putting old plays in new forms.

I do not wish to enter here upon a discussion of the theory of the representation of classics, old and new, on the modern stage. I have written a chapter on the subject in my book on "*The Theatre of Max Reinhardt*." The view therein expressed



THE KAMERNY THEATRE: MOSCOW.

Two examples of neo-realistic synthesis. Above:—*Phèdre*, by Racine. The stage is set with levels at different angles, and with simple volumes to aid the rhythmic harmony of the acting, which is a mixture of Yoga-practice and circus aerobatics. The latter reveals a Left influence. Below:—*Romeo and Juliet*, by Shakespeare. A neo-realistic treatment of the Balcony Scene. The scenery reveals the crystal forms of which the neo-realistic scenery is composed. It does not harmonise with the characters.





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is that the great tragic plays, for instance, sprang from the need of the moment. "The *Œdipus*" had its origin in one set of circumstances. "King Lear" had another origin. Each had its own dramatic basis. The structure, emotion, representation, and interpretation of these plays vary according to race, temperament and epoch. If, then, the Greek drama was produced by a peculiar set of circumstances, it follows that it cannot stir anyone who is not intimate with these circumstances, that is, produced by the same set of circumstances, or who possesses the same spirit that produced it. The failure to understand this truth results, as a rule, in the reproduction of classics not as originally conceived and produced, but as up-to-date burlesques. Even the still significant present-day producer, Max Reinhardt, for instance, bestows upon us not the whole, but fragments of classics and odds and ends of modern reforms, the whole united according to the prevailing idea of organic stage construction. The general result may be, and often is, pleasing; still it is never more than a hodge-podge of expression.

I found that my objection applied more to some productions than to others. I could not, for instance, agree that the original form and content of Racine's "*Phèdre*" called for the assistance of an architect (gifted, it is true), to express them in the mathematical formula followed in the advanced theatre to-day. The use of platforms at different levels and angles, of masses of monumental architecture dynamic in character, and of costumes to match, doubtless served the producer's purpose of bringing out the eternal rhythmic harmony of the play as he conceived it. But to me the question was, did Racine conceive his tragedy to be treated like this? If not, how much was there of Racine and how much of Tairov? Again, it seemed to me that the representation of Hoffmann's "*Senor Formica*" was less open to objection. The aim of the treatment was to produce the spirit of Hoffmann. According to the producer's conception, Hoffmann's characters have two sides, a worldly and unworldly. So all engaged in the production, players, decorators, composers, were invited to express this dual character of man and demon. Thus the doctor in the piece was expected to be doctor and demon by turn, and he was given a costume which expressed the duality. Likewise, everything in the

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production—scenery, costumes, properties, colour, line, form—was made to express two sides. The result was fantastical, or demoniacal, in the extreme. In the attempt to impart two sides to the scenery, it was arranged at all levels and all angles, and given different heights. Certainly the scenery, costumes, colours, lines, and form of "Senor Formica" had an extraordinary unity, and these things were carefully subordinated to a single end, the realisation of the Hoffmann dualistic idea. But here the unity ended. The background was one thing and the figures were another. In spite of the production being sternly organised as a whole, the scenery and costumes refused to harmonise with the figures, simply because its duality was comparatively static, whereas the duality of the figures was dynamic. The one was stationary, the other always unfolding, continually changing from one side, the good, to the other, the bad. A similar objection applied to the cubist treatment of "Romeo and Juliet." The sketch-like scenery and costumes designed by Exter did not harmonise with the full-bodied characters. The scenery for the Balcony Scene did not suggest the rhythmic harmony of the Shakespearean love-spirit. The acting did.

The search for the dual spirit of a play which characterises the work of the Kamerny theatre can, of course, be made only in plays of substance. Plays that have a modern side, or recently written plays, seem to lend themselves best to the severe organised treatment. If I were asked, I would rank Claudel's "L'annonce faite à Marie" among the successes. At any rate, the rhythmic harmony of the piece found in the mystery of self-sacrifice in love does more completely lend itself to an attempt to organise the style of the harmony, if I may put it this way. Thus instead of being a stylistic representation of a particular period after the manner of Reinhardt, or Stanislavsky, or Gemier of Paris, Claudel's play at the Kamerny theatre is a picture of an eternal style, to which the Gothic ideas of the architect, Vesnin, largely contribute, much as a play by Ibsen would be if treated intelligently, notwithstanding that Ibsen's plays are the expression of eternal needs fitted in contemporary social surroundings. But the latter is merely a concession by Ibsen to the gallery. In "A Doll's House" the thing that really matters is woman's eternal need of enlighten-

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ment into the truth of her marriage relations. As the play proceeds, Nora is seen unfolding under the touch of experience towards a heightened consciousness. Logically, this play could go on for ever, like Tennyson's *brook*, or a Chinese play, by making Nora attain different levels of experience till she pops her head into Heaven, as Swedenborg did, or as Goethe tried to do in the second part of his immortal "*Faust*."

Amadeus Hoffmann's "*Princess Brambilla*," and Oscar Wilde's "*Salome*," also kept my objection awake. In "*Brambilla*" I saw in imagination Hoffmann and Tairov taking the stage and engaging in a long controversy. There was the over emotional German writer of one period and the rigidly disciplined Russian director of another. Tairov was telling Hoffmann that his uncontrolled emotion must be strictly brain-and-body disciplined in order to attain the effect which he, Tairov, and Hoffmann desired. Hoffmann replied that Tairov was far too subtle and ingenious for the kind of exhibition which he had designed, and departed, leaving Tairov and his rhythmic harmony in possession of the stage.

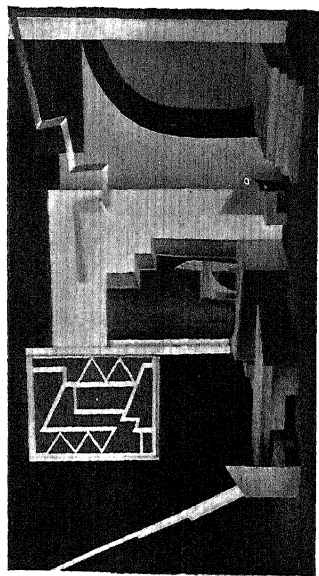
In "*Salome*," Tairov's theory did not reach its full realisation. There was, for instance, a stage divided into two halves by having the right half raised above the level of the left. This right half with its black well was used as a stage upon which Salome did all her acting. The left and lower half was occupied by a confined mass of figures, Herod and his courtiers. Perhaps Salome acquired a certain amount of importance from having a clear portion of the stage to herself, but the increased height of this portion did not show her in the round any more than the flat stage would have done. Again, it could be seen that the acting was searching for something. The rhythmic movements and gestures, recalling those of dancers, had a certain relation to the rhythm of the action of the play. They were not, however, spontaneous movements born of inner necessity, but movements belonging to a system. The scenery composed of columns and curtains was also clearly designed to continue the rhythmic harmony. But it did not succeed. One expected the scenery to act. For instance, the energy collected during the scene between Salome and Herod which reaches its climax in the cry of the former, "*I shall dance to thee, Tetrarch!*" and the succeeding joyous greedy cry of Herod, should have

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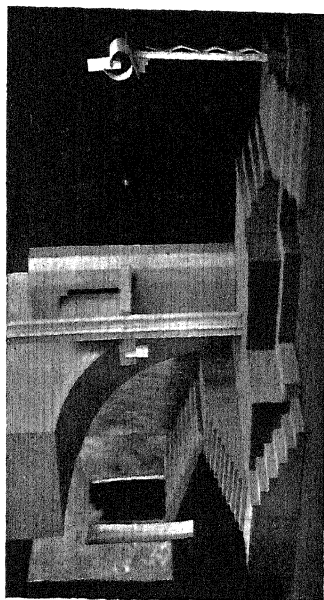
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torn aside the vibrating black cloth which masks the red curtain of the dance of death bloodstained by the drunken beams of the moon. But the curtains did not act. And all the energy of the big closing scene with its maddened atmosphere of love and death, and the prostrate form of Salome disappearing beneath the catafalque formed by the shields of Herod's soldiers, should set everything in the scene vibrating down to the lowered black wing-like pennons. But with the exception of masses of red tinging the two massive columns, which formed the scene, nothing happened. The brain-and-body disciplined Neo-realistic theatre is a notable achievement. And if its principles are reserved for plays that proceed only from brain and body disciplined sources the result will be immeasurable.

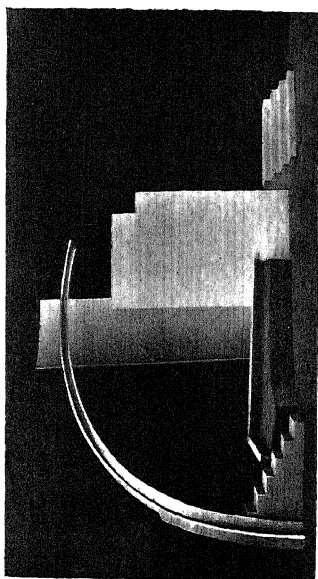




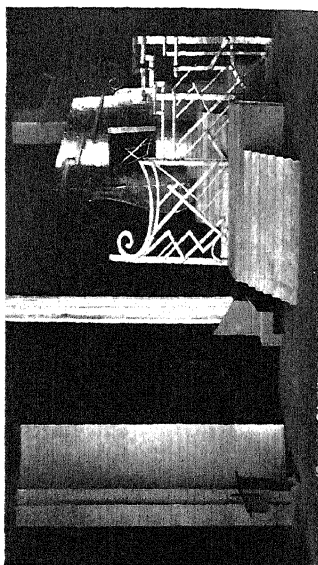
ACT I.



ACT II.



ACT III.



ACT IV.

# THE CENTRAL JEWISH THEATRE.

*Uriel Acosta*, by Carl Guzkow.

Space-construction. Four scenes designed by Nathan Altman for the material part of the play. The walls of the stage are covered with a black cloth and the centre of the stage is occupied by concentrated scenery consisting of iron, glass, etc., intended to concentrate and so give the action tragic intensity. It is an architectural engineer's conception of the scene as a thing of space, volumes and levels, and is another blow at the prevailing "aesthetic" one.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *THE CENTRE GROUP (Continued)*

#### (iii) THE CENTRAL JEWISH THEATRE (JEWISH KAMERNY, ETC)

**B**ELONGING to the New theatre are certain Jewish theatres which may be said to represent the Jewish theatrical interests in Russia. There are two very important ones in Moscow. One of these is the Central Jewish theatre or Jewish Kamerny theatre, as it is sometimes called. On the official notepaper are the words, "State Jewish theatre," which means that the theatre is one of the remaining four subsidised by the Soviet Government. The word Kamerny means Chamber. As there are several chamber theatres, there are several Kamerny theatres. This particular Jewish theatre began as a school in 1919. In 1921 the school was organised into a theatre under the direction of Alexis M. Granovsky. The theatre was conceived of as an instrument for initiating the spectator into the truth of the Jewish soul. The two aims upon which it was based were:—1. Nationalism. The expression of Jewish history, life and experiences. 2. Psychology and æsthetic synthesis. Language, gesticulation, sound, movement, colour, all to be combined so as to express the spirit of each production. This is a form of stylisation.

Thus the theatre was conceived of as an instrument of national expression intended to produce in the spectator a respect for and sympathy with the Jewish people and their cause. Actually it may be said to be engaged in propaganda. At the same time, it has very little to do with the object of the State theatre. If any of its plays happen to exhibit communist principles, it is because such principles can be read into them, and not because the plays are selected to exhibit these principles.

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For instance "Uriel Acosta" was designed by its author to discredit the Orthodox Church. But it also provides a dramatic and scenic representation of Jewish thought and action. The same may be said of Shakespeare's plays and the Bible. You can read anything you like into them, mysticism, religion, history, socialism, communism, and so forth. Generally speaking, the plays produced in Russia to-day by the Groups under consideration admit of a radical interpretation.

The method followed by the Central Jewish theatre is similar to that of the other semi-academic theatres. Acting comes first. The abstract principle upon which the system of acting is based is the simple proposition that if each play contains something of its own to be dramatically communicated to the spectator, then the most efficient way of achieving this communication is so to discipline the brain and body of the actor that he can abstract this something and communicate it unimpeded and without loss.

This requires, as we have seen already, a system of acting and training capable of putting the actor in complete control of the material, means and conditions for the exhibition and communication of the spirit. He must have an organised and disciplined brain and body. The conventional theatre reverses this order. There the actor is undisciplined and unorganised, or, as the men of the new theatre say, a theatrical lie.

Besides a system of acting capable of producing the highly efficient actor, a form of stage and setting capable of assisting the actor were required. These two requirements assumed a method of production suited to the particular "style" of each play.

Experiments at this theatre with a new dramatic interpretation and scenic representation have led to the results noticed elsewhere. 1. A complete break with the naturalistic and conditional forms. 2. The use of essential neo-Realistic forms designed to help the acting and to secure unity. 3. The use of the three-dimensional stage broken up in order to obtain richness and variety of rhythmic movement and to give full value to the three-dimensional actor. 4. The use of volumes architectural and geometrical instead of painted planes. These volumes provide different levels and allow movements to be made at different heights. 5. The liberal



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use of steps and platforms and wooden structures for obtaining movements at different heights. 6. The use of adaptable and schematic scenery and properties, which can be quickly changed and put to different uses. For instance, the property used in the "Death of Tarelkin," which is a bier and a table by turns.

While the principle of acting and actor training is much the same throughout the new unified theatre, the scenery varies. That of the extreme Left Group is simply schematic structures. In the more progressive section of the Centre Group and the Right Group (the Moscow Art theatre Studios), it mostly consists of curtains, architectural forms and crystal patterns produced in plastics. At the Central Jewish theatre where there is an intense preoccupation with form, I noticed three styles of scenery.

The first was applied to "Uriel Acosta"; the second, and totally different, to "Koldunaja"; and the third, also differing from the other two, to an exhibition consisting of three one-act pieces.

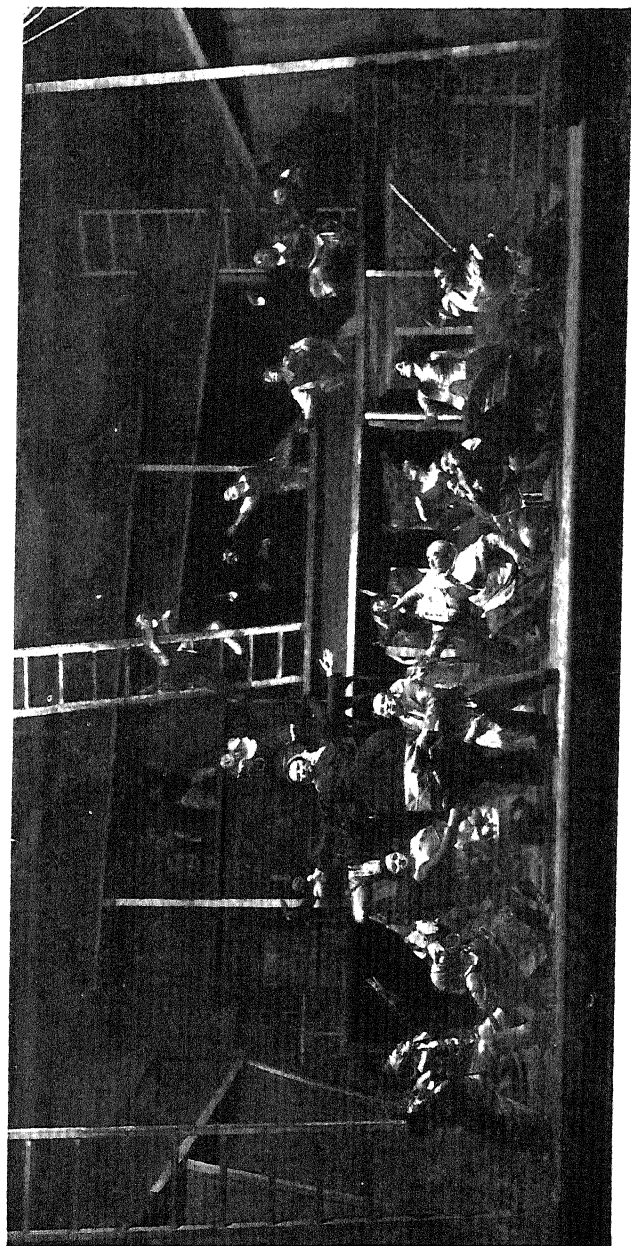
"Uriel Acosta" is the well-known play by Karl Gutzkow, the German author. It was written at Paris in 1846. Gutzkow belonged to the young German political school of extreme radicals. In his early youth he was much under the influence of mysticism, but later turned from mysticism to enlightenment of another sort. He was particularly opposed to orthodoxy. It is necessary to give these biographical facts, because they reveal certain elements of the play. This play deals with an author who holds a different opinion from that held by the leaders of the orthodox Jewish Church. He is in consequence persecuted by the priests, with the result that in the end he shoots himself. Here we have an instance of the suppression of liberty of thought by the Church, which is one of the objections raised by the communists against the Orthodox Church. In their opinion, Church persecution and the denial of liberty is an excuse for an attack on the Church. A similar thing happened at the time of the French Revolution, when there was an outburst of free-thinking.

The plot of the play as produced at the Central Jewish theatre revealed the struggle between Acosta and the Church, which is made more tragic by the introduction

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of a strong love interest. Uriel Acosta was born in Spain, of Jewish parents, whose religion was suppressed by the Inquisition. Acosta was made a Christian against his will. Soon after he and his family fled to New York, the new Amsterdam, where Acosta was able to assert his Jewish rights. He was appointed tutor to Judith, the daughter of a Dutchman. An affection sprang up between them. An obstacle was presented in the form of (1) The former tutor of Judith, and (2) Acosta's new book, which was condemned by the priests as heretical. The action of the play is concerned with the removal of these two obstacles to the wedding of Acosta with Judith. Acosta is ordered by the Chief Rabbi to recant the opinions contained in his book by destroying the book itself. This, at first, Acosta refuses to do. He defends himself in a long monologue, which he concludes with the words, "Condemn me, I am a Jew." The Rabbi Santos thereupon reads the condemnation, which contains a sentence very much like a curse, and says, "the heart of every woman will decline the love of Acosta." Judith immediately denies this, exclaiming, "You lie, Rabbi. He is loved." Judith's father agrees to her marriage with Acosta if the latter will destroy his book. His sick mother and ruined brothers implore him to destroy it. Moved by their exhibition of suffering, he consents. His rival then proceeds to exploit the circumstance, with the result that he ruins Judith's father, and Judith, seeing the terrible condition of her father, agrees to marry him. Meanwhile Acosta has been arrested. He prepares himself for the awful business of renunciation, not knowing that Judith has consented to marry his rival and that his mother has died. The powerful renunciation scene takes place. Towards the end the old spirit reasserts itself, and Acosta withdraws his recantation. When he hears about Judith, he hastens to her father's house, but is too late to stop the wedding. Then comes the last meeting of Judith and Acosta. Judith, left alone, finds the weight of her sacrifice too heavy. She takes poison. Before she dies she gives Acosta a warm confirmation of her love. Acosta utters his last monologue, "I am the man who dies in the middle of his career, not having reached the wonderful land of Truth." Saying which he exits and shoots himself. The Rabbi and a crowd of orthodox Jews enter. They



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*The Sorrowers.* The second style of scenery at this theatre. There is no backdrop and the acting is assisted by the use of ladders, platforms and wooden structures. The scenery and properties, which are clearly influenced by the Left, are schematic and adaptable and admit of rapid changes.



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tremble at the sound of the shot. To them it is a prophecy of a terrible tempest.

Such is the story of the play with its communistic implications. The scenery was designed by Nathan Altmann to illustrate the principles of space construction. He regarded the play as a form of concentrated tragedy, and decided that the scenery should partake of this character. Accordingly he covered the walls of the stage with black drapery, and in the space thus obtained he placed simple volumes. These were constructed to occupy a circumscribed space, with the object of concentrating energy and interest, and avoiding the diffusion and waste which belong to conventional scenery. Moreover, he discarded painters' effects, using any solid materials that helped him in his search for simplicity, concentration, intensity and rhythmic movement, that is, the kind of musical movement described in the chapter on the Kamerny theatre. obtained by steps forming contrasted musical intervals. Altmann has given me his reason for constructing scenery on a new principle. He was dissatisfied with the picture stage and with the kind of illusion sought by the painter. In his view, the work of the studio painter on the stage is calculated only to make an impression on the eye. Nathan wanted more than this. He wanted to organise the mind and consciousness by visible forms, and so bring scenery into line with social activity. He was, in fact, occupied with the new Realism, which not only describes the surrounding world, but gives you the image of its inner reality. Altmann assumed that the spectator was no longer satisfied with exterior sensations. He demanded accurate, clear images of the emotions and of the soul which certain materials and means belonging to Art can give him. This means that Altmann had done with illusionist forms and painted surfaces. He had done with the paint-pot and wanted wood, iron, cement, or any other solid to work with. He saw the actor actually in three dimensions, whereas the painted canvas only gave the illusion of three dimensions. So he resolved to place real three-dimensional volumes in real space. Such volumes were not designed mechanically to represent things, but to construct and to give a concept of the environment in which the actor seeks to create. Apparently he got no satisfaction from the box-like stage. In his work for

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"Uriel Acosta" he found no opportunity to remove the walls. So he had to compromise. He covered them with velvet, and thereby pushed them out to infinity. He now proposes to do away with footlights, curtain, and all the cumber of the Illusion stage. He regards this work as demanded by the spirit of the times. It is part of the development of the period. He imagines that the theatre of the Future will be the open-air Mass theatre of the market-place, street-corner and public square. In pushing the walls of the stage out and reuniting the stage and auditorium, he is simply pushing himself into the street. He is one of the younger decorators upon whom the Revolution has exercised a strong influence. He thinks that scenery has a social message, and that the neo-Realist decorator is the man to deliver it.

The scenery for "Goldunaja" ("The Sorceress") was of a different character. It was the joint work of Alexis Granovsky and J. Rabinovitsch. It was both symbolical and adaptable. It represented a little Jewish town, at first belonging to the inhabitants. Later this town is shown to be in the possession of one rich man by adding some screens and a chair or two, and in these and other ways removing the appearance of general life. The model of the scene had the appearance of a scientific toy which can be taken to pieces and put together in different forms. The most noticeable parts of the scenery were tall ladders reaching from the floor of the stage almost to the flies, and communicating with platforms at different levels. They were like the ladder that ascends to Heaven in Jacob's Dream. Suspended midway on these ladders were figures gesticulating wildly and generally behaving as though they were mad. These figures were supposed to be the "do-nothings" belonging to the little town. They were people who trade in the air, so to speak. They never work, but make money by speculating and trading in things which they never handle, like gamblers on the Stock Exchange. Their existence is an empty one. "They work not, neither do they spin" (except lies).

"Goldunaja" was in three acts and eight pictures. It told the story of a cruel stepmother trying with the assistance of a sorceress to get rid of her stepdaughter in order to possess the latter's inheritance. This story provided ample material for crowd scenes, movement, colour, and contrasted Jewish types.

## THE CENTRAL JEWISH THEATRE

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It opened with a feast at the house of the father of Mirele, the stepdaughter, and thus introduced a crowd of Jewish characters. There is much singing and merriment. Towards the end of this "picture," the father was arrested, no one knew why, and the feast was spoiled. In the second picture the sorceress appeared. She plotted with the stepmother to secure the riches of the father and to get rid of Mirele for the purpose. The sorceress admitted that she was responsible for the arrest of the father. The third picture was a market-place filled with another highly interesting crowd of Jews. The sorceress and her confederates stole Mirele's money, according to plan, with the result that she was left helpless. Act 2 opened with another animated picture. Mirele was sold for fifteen chervonez (the new Soviet currency) to a merchant from Stambul. Thereafter began a search for Mirele by her lover. This is a familiar motive in comic opera, and is usually introduced for the purpose of obtaining contrasted pictorial scenery. The second picture discovered a number of young girls under the spell of the sorceress. There was a good deal of hypnotising in this picture, which ended with the news that Mirele was leaving for Stambul. By which the spectator was prepared for picture three, Stambul. This again was a highly interested crowd picture of Turkish types. The comic opera motive was again apparent. There was the man in search of Mirele. He offered the Turks a reward for her discovery. This introduced a number of girls for identification, and finally came Mirele herself. Whereupon there was another feast, much joy, singing and dancing. So the story arrived at the first picture of Act 3. The stepfather has been liberated, and has returned, much to the consternation of the stepmother. She appealed to the sorceress, who agreed to meet the party at an inn on their way from Stambul. She will drug them and burn down the inn while they are asleep. So picture two became necessary. There was the meeting at the inn, the poisoned feast, the drugged party, and the inn set on fire by the sorceress. Everybody looked like being roasted when a passer-by gave the alarm, and everybody was saved except the sorceress, who got what she deserved.

I was told that this play took two years to produce. The action certainly lent itself to the extraordinary methods of inter-

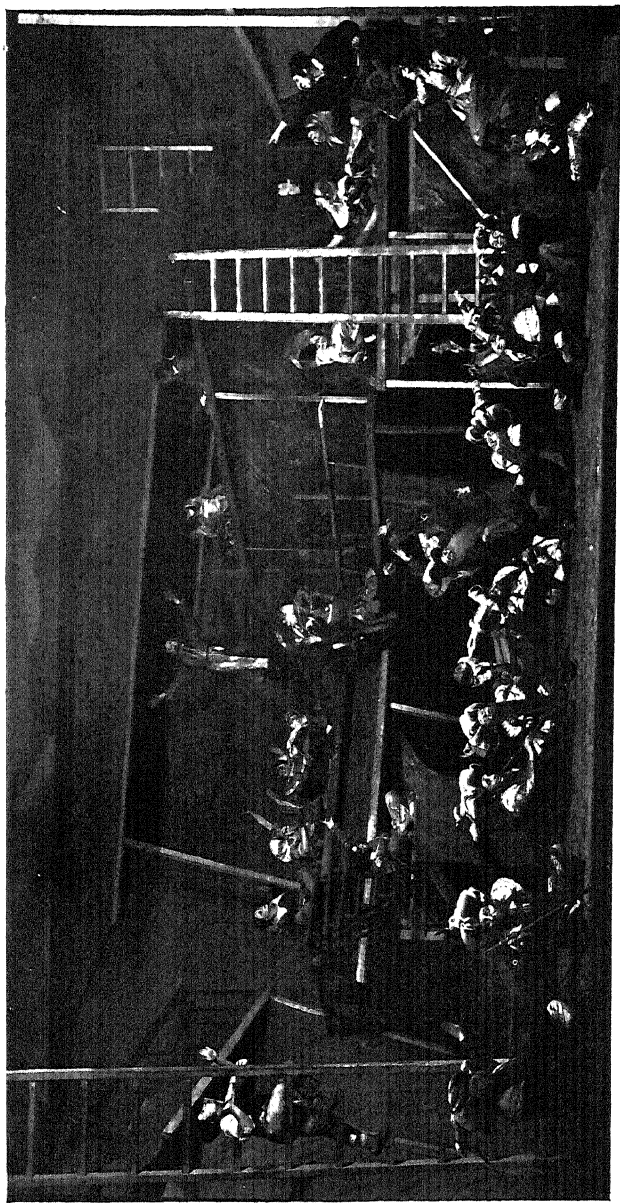
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pretation by the company, which require members to undergo a very long and careful training. The whole thing went with a great speed from beginning to end. At times the noise was deafening, and the frenzied movements quite bewildering. But throughout the control and flexibility of body and voice were clearly unmistakable. Another outstanding feature was the mask-like make-up of the actors. The masks were built on the face in a manner that succeeded in depersonalising each actor, and giving his face an abstract quality which was almost fixed. The grease paint and paste was so thick and the colour and lines so definite that the natural movements of the features, *i.e.*, cheeks, lips and eyes, hardly made a perceptible difference. Like the Japanese mask, the abstract idea of the make-up quite concealed the identity of the wearer. Doubtless the aim was to add to the national spirit of the performance as much as possible. As a matter of fact, the faces were calculated to exhibit the Jewish image by the most direct method. Whether the frenzied athletic movements and the vocal gymnastics also went to the root of the matter is uncertain. Probably they expressed the great vitality and intense energy of the Jewish people. Only the "do-nothings" suspended in mid-air appeared out of the scheme. They were going like the rest. One can truthfully say that they did as much work in five minutes as the actual "do-nothing" does in a lifetime. I suppose it was the neo-Realistic way of expressing idleness.

Another dramatic interpretation and scenic representation appeared in three sketches. Each had a very interesting scene designed by Marc Chagal. The first was a satire on insurance agents. The action took place in a railway carriage. The scenery consisted of two white railway seats with racks, and a curved piece like an iron girder suggesting the form of the carriage. The second scene was also a suggestion of a railway station. There was a red signal. In front of this a green bench. To the right of the seat a black lamp-post all askew. Two gossips seated on the bench completed the picture. The third scene was much more elaborate. It resembled one of Chagal's latest pictures, in which he endeavours to express the effect of a number of unrelated objects seen at a single glance. One saw a futurist kitchen interior composed of planes painted in different colours, and decorated with chaotic objects, the





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*The Sorceress.* Another scene, showing the scenery adapted to another place and people, Turkey and Tucks. Also suggests the extraordinary acrobatic acting which out-Yogas Yoga. Every part is highly individualised and the result of two years' preparation.



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whole suggesting the restlessness of the communist action. The latter was concerned with the doings of a hawker, who tames a shrewish mistress by exhibiting socialist literature.

These three pieces could hardly be said to express Jewish sentiments. Perhaps they were chosen for the instructive amusement of the new audience. Though the entertainment only lasted an hour, the house was full. It should be said that very few plays have been produced at this theatre since the opening. One reason is that the preparation of each play takes a very long time. Another is that economic circumstances do not permit the theatre to give performances regularly. Both "Uriel Acosta" and "Goldunaja" are performed at intervals. Again, the actors are obliged to supplement their meagre theatrical earnings by doing ten-to-four Government jobs which do not interfere with their constant training.



OLD JEWISH THEATRE (The Gabima). *Gadybuk*. Act ii. A Courtyard. Scenery designed by Nathan Altmann in his early futuristic manner.

## CHAPTER XV

### *THE CENTRE GROUP (Continued)*

#### (iv) THE OLD JEWISH THEATRE (THE GABIMA)

THE second important Jewish theatre is the Gabima. This was also conceived of as an instrument for intensely expressing Jewish life and ideals. Hence it is concerned with Jewish propaganda. It differs from the Central Jewish theatre in several ways. For one thing, its object is to use the old pure form of Jewish language. The Central theatre uses the modern corrupt form. Consequently the dialogue spoken at the Gabima is extremely difficult to understand.

It also has very little to do with the objects of Lunacharsky's

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theatre. Still its productions are not altogether free from the radical spirit. Its technique leans very heavily on the Left.

The Gabima is a very small structure. The auditorium and stage are converted out of a panelled room in an old house in a decayed quarter of Moscow. There are 126 seats, which, like the walls, are covered with grey canvas. Four rows of seats are on the floor of the room and level with the stage. At the back of these are three rows rising in tiers and divided in the middle by the one entrance to the auditorium, resembling an entrance to circus seats. The stage is very small and on the ground level. It has a proscenium and curtain, but no foot-lights. And there is no orchestra. When the curtain is up and the play in full swing, the front row of spectators disappears beneath the cloud of dust raised by the extremely athletic actors, who almost tread on their toes.

This little theatre, which is hardly adequate to the reasonable purposes of its forms of drama, began in a modest way as a Studio. It was one of several Studio theatres organised by Stanislavsky. Later it became a theatre. Its work since it began as a Studio was directed till a year ago by a very talented young Jew named Vahtangov, who died in 1922. Vahtangov, who has been spoken of as the most remarkable producer after Meierhold, left the Moscow Art theatre in order to apply his advanced theories in a more suitable sphere than that afforded by Stanislavsky's theatre. But it cannot be said that he broke away from the Moscow Art theatre methods. It would be correct to say that he developed those methods by adding principles of his own and other principles which he derived from the methods of the Left Group. The actor is the soul of the Moscow Art theatre. The actor is the soul of the Gabima. For twenty years and more Stanislavsky has sought to perfect acting such as he conceived it to be. Vahtangov also aimed to produce a perfect acting machine, an actor disciplined in brain and body. This sort of machine is by way of becoming standardised in the New Russian theatre. But we must not confuse it with Stanislavsky's machine. Stanislavsky did not tell the actor to control his muscles, sinews and brain cells. He told him to subordinate himself to the spirit of the play, and to become part of a company acting as one man. He initiated

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him into the mysteries of the ensemble, which, when one comes to think of it, are not mysteries at all.

Before considering Vahtangov's method further, let me examine his aim. It was to find a form suited to the dramatic communication of the Jewish traditional national spirit. He himself was not a revolutionist in the communist sense. He had no political axe to grind. Nor was he a violent theatrical revolutionist. There is no evidence that he wanted to shake the stage to its foundations. Still, in a way, he found himself during the Revolution. He respected some of the old values of the theatre, but he did not fight for them. He even went in the direction of the new current. His contribution to the general stream of radical ideas probably came from Tibet. He was interested in all sorts of Tibetan mysteries. He sought occultism in plays, and he introduced Yoga practice to acting. It was in the latter respect, in the introduction of Eastern discipline to the Western actor, that he advanced beyond his old temple, the Moscow Art theatre.

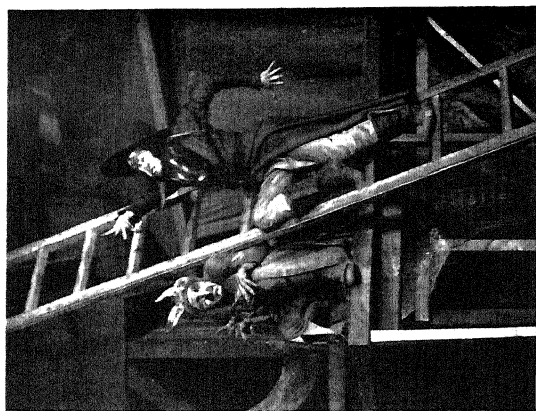
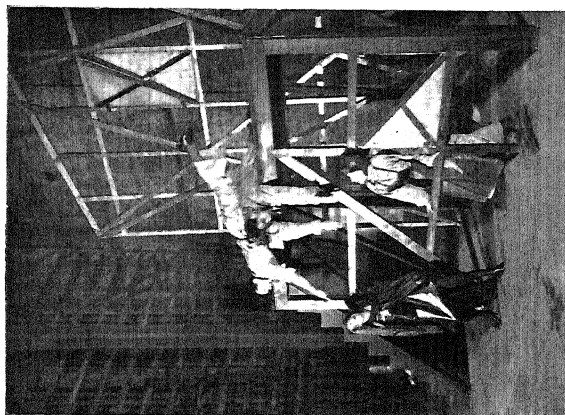
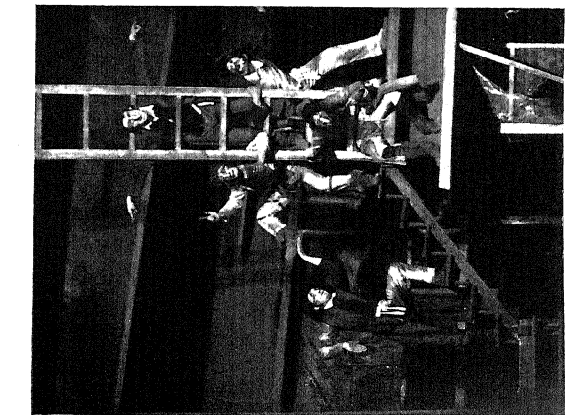
The method suited to Vahtangov's aim was fairly elaborate. It is not necessary to describe it in detail. This would mean repeating much that has been said already.

1. As to acting. This demanded that the sheer output of emotion and energy should be tamed and trained by successive stages of development till the actor could play with it as the wireless operator plays with the ether.

2. As to production:—

- (a) The play is to be read to the assembled company.
- (b) The spirit of the play is to be sought and found.
- (c) The parts are to be analysed.
- (d) Every part is to be built up slowly and carefully under the watchful eye of the director.
- (e) Every word is to be learnt separately.
- (f) The meaning of every gesture and movement is to be studied.
- (g) The law of association is to be put in operation. Gaps are to be left in the action of the play, to be filled in by the spectator.

It is not surprising to hear that under these conditions a play



[Photographs by the Author.

Three scenes, offering a comparison between the methods of Meierhold's theatre and the Central Jewish Theatre. Left and right details of *The Sorceress*, showing the use of house ladders and platforms, as well as the extraordinary mask-like make-up. Centre:—Scenery for *The Magnificent Cuckold*, by Grommidek. This reveals the mechanic playing with his machine-like structures and using the rhythm which they have taught him. Left and right:—Reveal highly trained actors expressing a similar rhythm.





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takes as long as three years to produce. The wonder is that it does not take an eternity. The natural consequence is that every part is individualised, a unity in itself, and all parts are bound together by the predominating spirit of the play. So comes a cool-headed severely organised performance with not a technical flaw to quibble over. The spiritual side may, however, be different. It all depends on the vision of those who seek and find the spirit. For if they find the wrong one, the whole thing will be wrong from beginning to end. Just as if you put a bloodhound on a false scent, it will take a false path and reach a false end. A chief cause of this fault is the application of strict logic to the production of a play. I had two very good illustrations of how misconception sacrifices not only the aim of a play, but the aim of a theatre itself. The first was "Gadybuk," a play drawn from material which certainly contained the Jewish national spirit, and therefore belonged to the aim of the Gabima. It was written by S. Ankim between 1913 and 1915. In 1912 Ankim made a tour of the South of Russia, where the Jews were located. He carried out researches into Jewish religious belief and customs, and obtained a quantity of valuable information. One result appeared in the play, "Gadybuk." The period of this play was the early nineteenth century, when the Polish Jews were manifesting a form of religious faith called Chasidism, which originated in the eighteenth century. The Chasidists, composing a new religious sect, mainly of clergymen, were opposed to the orthodox belief of the Rabbis. Chasidism embraces a sort of religious ecstasy to be attained by methods similar to Yoga practice. It is based on purity of contact with reality. Anyone can attain it. But it was confined to a body of men who were chosen for their purity of heart and soul. These facts are worth noting, because they reveal that the original play rested on Jewish religious belief and culture, whatever the dramatic interpretation and scenic representation expressed. Further facts are that the original play was written in Russian and new Jewish. It was translated into the old Jewish for the Gabima by H. N. Bilekom. There were originally four acts. But at the Gabima the third and fourth acts became the third act, and other alterations were made

The result, as I saw it after it had been carefully produced by

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Vahtangov, was as follows. The first act introduced the spectator to the dark and dingy interior of an old synagogue, and to three characters who were discussing Chasidism. There were touches of Jewish ritual, after which the principal male character, Hanan, was left alone on the stage. Hanan was a religious fanatic who was studying for the Church. He was in love with Leah, the daughter of a prosperous merchant. Leah's father wanted her to marry money. But his arrangement made for the purpose broke down, and Hanan believed it was due to the mysterious force which is in himself. At this moment he was in the grip of a spiritual ecstasy. He was firmly convinced that he had control of a mysterious force which allowed him to interfere with and destroy any arrangements that did not suit his end. He was much pre-occupied with the mystic number 36, and exhibited certain Jewish symbols each containing four branches which together formed 36. A discussion followed between Hanan and Enoch, another character, on the question of purification. The worst sin, it appeared, was the attraction between man and woman, but this attraction could be spiritualised, so that no harm comes of it. The conclusion was illustrated by the appearance of Leah, between whom and Hanan there was a sort of spiritual interchange of greetings. Neither said much, but in the end Hanan exclaims, "I have won." Subsequently news was brought that Leah's father had carried out his arrangements after all. Hanan believed that his mysterious force was leaving him. He tried to grapple it, and called in the aid of one of the sacred books. In vain, the force left him, and he died. The scene closed with a theatrical "curtain." The father and a number of other characters entered. The father announced that a feast would be given to celebrate his daughter's wedding. There was a great outburst of singing and dancing. The dance grew quicker and quicker till it reached a point of madness. All the time the dead body lay fully exposed to the audience, but concealed from the dancers. Then there was the sudden discovery of the body. One took the sacred book from the dead man's hand. They all turned to examine it. When they looked again Hanan had vanished.

Act 2 passed in the courtyard of the father's house. It revealed the spell working which Hanan had cast over Leah.

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The first part of the act gave the spectators a very good idea of the nature of the training of the actors engaged in it. The characters included a number of Jewish beggars who had been invited to the feast. Each was a highly individualised study of a Jewish type. Each had a separate set of movements, a separate form of speech, each was closed in a realistic fantasy of his own or his director's creation. But all produced an unmistakable Jewish atmosphere. A strong power was seen at work controlling the thoughts and actions of Leah. At one point she asks if disembodied spirits actually live. A character named the Wanderer entered at this point. The Wanderer represented the conscience of the people's soul and the direction it takes. He wandered through the play and acted as a sort of Greek chorus, explaining points that required explanation. To Leah's question he replied, "Yes, they unite with the souls of the living." This sent Leah off to the cemetery to invite the soul of her dead lover. Animated scenes followed, introducing the bridegroom and wedding guests. Finally come the bride, accompanied by sounds of the wedding melody. Leah prepared for the ceremony, behaving like one possessed. Just at the moment it was about to be performed she rejected the bridegroom, saying "You are not my bridegroom." From a distance came Hanan's voice. Leah commenced to sing the "Song of Songs." The Wanderer entered and announced that another soul had entered Leah's and united it. The beggars received the information with a mystified shout.

Act 3 plunged the spectator into the business of exorcising the spirit and delivering Leah's soul from its power. The act had several tense moments. It was set in the interior of a synagogue. Priests were told of Leah's condition, and a trial was decided upon. It appeared that the fathers of Leah and Hanan were friends in their youth. They both married at the same time, and they took an oath that their children, if a boy and girl, should marry. Thus the spirits of Hanan and Leah were united by their parents. Subsequently circumstances separated the two fathers. Hanan's father died almost forgotten, without anyone praying for him. It was his evil spirit which had entered Hanan and passed from him to Leah. The two fathers, living and dead, were put on trial. The judgment

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of the court was that Leah's father should pray for Hanan's father, and so propitiate the bad or unsanctified spirit. To this Leah's father consented. But Hanan's father had disappeared, so nothing happened. The head priest accordingly decided to cure Leah himself. There was a big display of Jewish ritual, and the spirit came forth. The priest drew a magic circle round Leah, and all except her made their exit. Then Leah heard sighs and the sound of the "Song of Songs" outside the magic circle. She exclaimed, "I am going to leave my bridegroom." With the force of love she broke the magic circle, and her soul rejoined that of Hanan. Here the Wanderer re-entered and covered her body as in the first act he covered that of Hanan. The sound of the "Wedding March," slowly filled the scene. "It is too late," exclaimed the Wanderer. Then came the sound of the mystic melody, the "Song of Songs," before which the "Wedding March" melted away like mist touched by the sun. Curtain.

The scenery for this effective production was designed by Nathan Altmann in his early futurist manner before he had arrived at space-construction and neo-Realism. It was accordingly broken up to express rhythm of form and colour. And the chairs and tables were placed at different angles and levels, doubtless for the same purpose. The last scene was very telling, with its long white table, at which the trial took place, sharply inclined towards the audience. An effective use was made of concealed lights, placed behind various stage objects, for instance, behind a pile of books on the table at which four figures were seated, thus carving them into Rembrandtesque masses of light and shade.

The chief objection to the production was that it did not express the Jewish national spirit. The spirit of the play was, first of all, spiritualism, and thereafter Vahtangov. It was not the Jewish spirit unfolding under the touch of spiritualism, but the spirit of any nation any one liked to take. If English or French people had been substituted for the Jews, the general effect would have been the same. The Rabbi objecting and trying to destroy the influence of the dead man might easily have been a minister of the Church of England. The most Jewish thing about it was the very careful studies of Jewish types by the actors and the Jewish virility and energy of their

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acting. They formed a very highly trained company of Jewish actors, giving an exposition of spiritualism common to all cultured races, and not exhibiting the effect of Jewish conception of spiritualism, mysticism, or magic on the Jewish people and their idea of the life beyond the grave.

Theatrically the production exhibited the difficulty of making an organic whole of: 1, a play which exhibits types of a people; 2, the psychology of an author who is not a symbolist, not a neo-romantic, not an extremist of any kind; 3, the majestic language of the old Jewish race; 4, the ritual and singing which has been in existence a thousand years; and 5, the modern traditions and methods initiated by the Moscow Art theatre. The effect it produced was that of an old mystical legend which had been turned into a modern expository work of art by accomplished artists and craftsmen. This production suggested that the Gabima ought to lay the foundations for a species of exhibition better suited to the Yoga-practice acting and the vocal training that enables the actors to change from speech, intonation, chant, song at will, with amazing swiftness and accuracy.

A similar objection can be made to the "Eternal Jew," a tragic legend in two acts, by Penskom. It is based upon a Talmud legend summed up in the words, "In the days when they were destroying the Church the Messiah was born." The opening scene introduces us to inhabitants of a small town near Jerusalem. To them a messenger arrives with the news that the Temple is destroyed. He says that the Messiah was born in the hour of destruction, and the mother and child are here in their midst. The people believe it, but the authorities do not. They see their authority threatened. A search is made, without result, and the people turn on the prophet, but the authorities now shield him. The authorities send forth representatives, in the belief that they will find nothing. A woman now appears who weeps over the destruction of Jerusalem, and speaks about a child which was born in the hour of destruction. The prophet assumes it is the Messiah. Representatives return affirming the destruction of Jerusalem. The people and the authorities are prepared to accept the word of the prophet. Their attention is directed to the woman and child. There is a tempest and the child disappears, leaving no trace.

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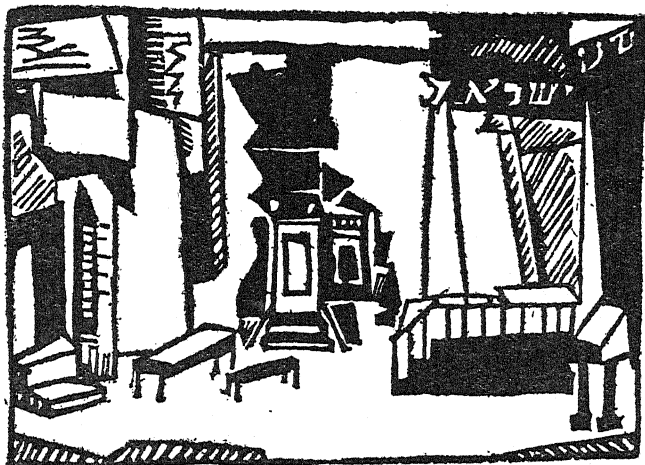
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The prophet tells the people they must search, it may be for centuries, till the child is found.

Such is the bare outlines of a story which is capable of two treatments, symbolical and national. The symbolical predominates. The one scene is symbolical. There is a dull red temple-like structure which remains throughout the play. At one side are steps leading to the highest point, while platforms are provided by the various architectural projections. The people moving about this structure live in a state of dirt and destitution near Jerusalem. Their whole time is occupied by trading. They live in ignorance, full of prejudice. All the beauty, force and idealism of life is centred in the Temple at Jerusalem, which symbolises their belief in God. When the Temple is destroyed the soul is taken out of them. When the Messiah is born, the Temple becomes a human one and the soul is restored. When the child is swept away by a tempest, their soul is taken away again. But the Temple is re-created, and their soul restored once more by Faith. They believe that if they search for the Messiah the Temple of faith will be rebuilt. Meanwhile, as they search they will be carried higher and higher. At the close of the last act the prophet ascends slowly to the highest point of the Temple. This symbolises the ascent of the Jewish soul. Here we have a rich Jewish subject, a people seeking to find deliverance from the chaos of the world and the purity and majesty of a godhead as the enemy of all evil. But how far is this Jewish motive, the belief in a single God, leading the Jews on the way to the Promised Land, expressed? What is the spirit which the play communicates to the spectator? It is the Jewish belief in a God. But it is not expressed socially by the Jewish people. It is expressed symbolically and æsthetically by symbolical and æsthetical forms and colours. Any other people could express it. It exhibits another fault, the one belonging also to "Gadybuk." The production is clearly a pretext to show the ideas of the producer. These ideas reflect great credit on the New Russian school of acting, but they do not always express the Jewish spirit shown in liveliness, quickness, rapid change of expression. Everything was slow. But the slowness may have been due to the principle of association applied by the production. Gaps were left in the action to be filled in imaginatively by the

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spectators. In short, the production was an abstraction of the objects and agents of interpretation rather than an abstraction of the Jewish people. All the same, it was a remarkable piece of work, which threw a clear light on a theatrical system to be found nowhere outside Russia.



OLD JEWISH THEATRE (The Gabima). Act i. Interior of a Synagogue.  
Scenery by Nathan Altmann.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *THE CENTRE GROUP (Continued)*

#### (v) CHILDREN'S THEATRE (STATE, CLUB, SCHOOL, &c.)

A GREAT deal has been done by the Soviet Government to promote the welfare of children and to encourage them to take part in creative occupations and recreations. The Russian children have been quick to take advantage of these efforts on their behalf. They are naturally interested in theatricals. They inherit from their ancestors a peculiar rich vein of dramatic impulse. The theatre to them is a second nature, as it were, and for this reason they have filled its stage and auditorium increasingly since 1918, when they were given freedom to do so.

Full citizen rights have been given to children by the State. They include free admittance to theatres; full opportunity to enjoy the best dramatic works; liberty to express themselves in schools. to act history instead of reading it; to take part in open-air performances, pageants, and demonstrations; to run their own theatres, to manage and control them; to write their own plays and act them; to form clubs and gymnasias. They also include self-possession, defiance of authority, and free training in communism.

One result is that a Children's theatre has arisen in Russia with a great number of forms. Generally it is conceived of as an instrument of State and self-expression. The State seeks to use it to liberate children from the older and reactionary traditions, and from the reactionary influences of their parents, by educating them in the principles of the new communistic life. The children are free to use it as a playground and a world of imagination, sentiment and taste, in which they can





THE STATE CHILDREN'S THEATRE: MOSCOW.

*Tom Sawyer*, by Mark Twain, as adapted and produced by Madame Henrietta Pascal. The arrangement of the scene and the make-up of two characters (right) reveal influences from the Left. Note the atmosphere of romantic heroism. "Aesthetic" effects are excluded and volumes and levels used.



## THE CHILDREN'S THEATRE

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assist the State to liberate them from traditions with which naturally they do not agree. Unconventional, revolutionary and democratic as children usually are, they find no difficulty in giving satirical expressions of the old society in which their parents figure, and creative expressions of the new one.

The most noticeable outcome of this movement towards a Children's theatre is the establishment of a Children's State theatre at Moscow. There is also a Children's theatre owned by the Moscow Soviet, and other theatres devoted to children's entertainments. But the State theatre is the most important. It owes much to Madam Henriette Pascar, who was largely responsible for its establishment four or five years ago.

The origin of the Children's theatre is much befogged by rumour. It started in a barn and so on. In 1922 a special theatre for children was planned in Moscow, but it never materialised. The Children's State theatre, the only one of its kind, was actually established in 1919 or thereabout. It was the conception of Madam Henriette Pascar, a beautiful and accomplished actress-producer. Nowadays, it gives performances at the Kamerny and other theatres. Madam Pascar's idea was to form a suitable repertory for children which, with her intense passion for romance and beauty, she was qualified to do. It was her desire, and the desire of those who supported her, including the Government, that this special theatre, and all its objects and agents, should rest on romantic heroism, of which children are so fond, and which is the new spirit of the Russian theatre. But it was not easy to find this species of exhibition among established masterpieces. So Madam Pascar proceeded to adapt and rewrite stories for the purpose. The theatre is subsidised by the Government. The management are not allowed to sell tickets. These are distributed to children in the theatre. The methods recall those of the State theatres. Subjects well-known to Russian children, like Kipling's and Mark Twain's stories, are selected and staged with impressionistic and futuristic decorations, every attention being paid to the imaginative side. Feodotoff does most of the decorations. The audiences of children follow the performances with deepest and keenest interest. I daresay some grown-up spectators would find watching the

## THE CENTRE GROUP

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children of more interest than watching the play. The first time I visited this theatre I found it simply swarming with children. They were thick as bees in the corridors, on the stairs, in the vestibule, everywhere. And they were all talking at once at a great speed. But as soon as the doors opened they crowded into the auditorium, took their seats, and filled every one, and sat quiet as mice waiting for the curtain to rise. It was a great sight. And while they sat motionless with their eyes fixed on the curtain, as though trying to read its secrets, I had an opportunity to study the thing that Soviet Russia produces in the way of a theatrical audience composed of children. They were all ages, all sizes, all shapes, and apparently all classes. But the class distinction was not very marked, except by cleanliness and looks. For they were all alike dressed plainly, cheaply, and mostly poorly. Some were dirty, some clean, some had an unmistakable working-class look, others were refined and genteel. They formed a strange democratic mixture exhibiting only those differences which, being born in the flesh, usually came out in the looks and behaviour. During the performance they were all equally well-behaved, better behaved than their elders, but during the intervals it was different. Then they were an intolerable nuisance. They seemed to enjoy a freedom of action that made them little tyrants and utterly ignore the control which grown-ups tried to exercise. They pushed their way in and out, trampled on your feet, talked and shouted till the place resembled pandemonium, and altogether behaved like children who are spoilt and encouraged to do just as they please, as the case is with present-day Russian children. On the whole, then, unrestrained Russian children do not make an ideal audience as yet. They, however, show that they are deeply receptive while the curtain is up. Whether they can maintain this attitude throughout a long performance without intervals I have had no means of finding out.

The nature of the fare set before them which rivets their attention may be gathered from two pieces.

One piece that I saw was Madam Pascal's version of Kipling's "Jungle Tales." It was called in Russian "Mowgli." A wolf family are living in a tropical jungle. A young wolf returns home one day bringing a child. The mother-wolf is

## THE CHILDREN'S THEATRE

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anxious to adopt the child and bring it up with her children. They christen the child Mowgli. There is a conference among the animals. The tiger and jackal want to eat him. The bear and panther want to save him. The latter offer the Council a big piece of beef as a bribe, which the Council accept, and allow the she-wolf to keep the child. The hatred of the tiger for the child, however, grows stronger and stronger. The panther, being aware of this, sends the child to the fire fairy to fetch the red flower, otherwise fire. He returns with glowing coal to the rock where the Council are assembled and frightens them away. He wins. He is a human being. He rewards the she-wolf for her fidelity by saving her from the vengeance of the other animals, after which he returns to civilisation.

Another piece was "Schelkunchik I Myshing Tsar" ("The Nutcracker and the King of the Mice.") It is Christmas Eve. The father and his child are preparing the Christmas tree. The godfather of the child arrives. He is a watchmaker. He gives his goddaughter a quaint nutcracker. The nutcracker is in the form of a wooden mechanical doll. She plays with it and puts it to bed very carefully. At night she has a dream. She sees the King of the Mice come forth and with his followers attack Nutcracker. All her dolls come to life, and take part in the battle on Nutcrackers' side. But the latter is gradually overcome, and just at the critical point the child throws a shoe, which frightens the mice away and saves Nutcracker. On another occasion she is ill. The godfather comes and tells her a story about a Princess, the King of the Mice, and a strong Nut. In this way the child learns that Nutcracker is very ugly, that he will become beautiful if he succeeds in killing the King of the Mice with seven heads, and if a little girl will love Nutcracker in spite of his ugliness. The child falls asleep. Nutcracker asks her to get him a sword. She does so, and Nutcracker fights the King of the Mice, kills him, takes off his seven little golden crowns, and as a sign of appreciation gives them to the child. Nutcracker has now recovered his good looks, and he and the child set out for the fairyland of Lemonade Rivers.

When the child wakes from her dream, much moved by what she has seen, she relates everything to her parents. The

## THE CENTRE GROUP

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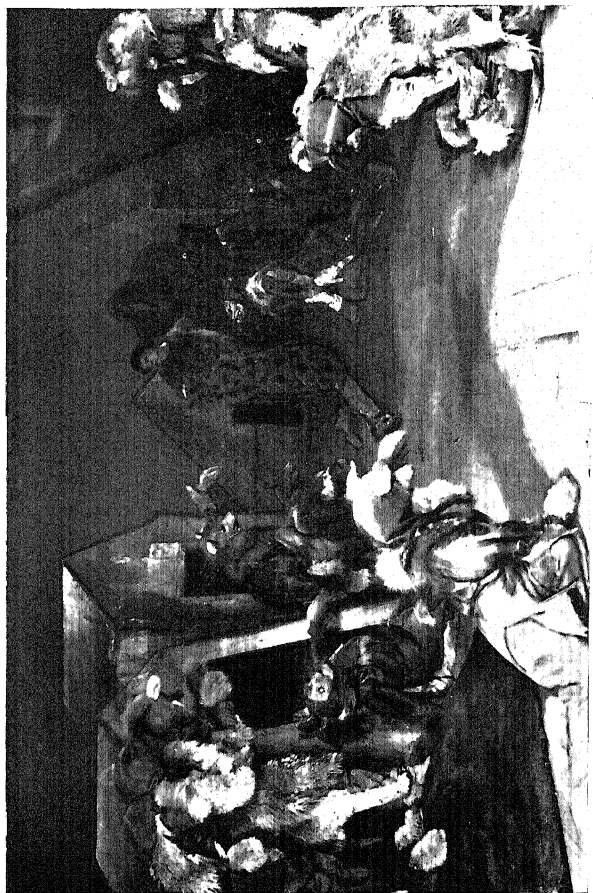
godfather arrives again, bringing with him his nephew from Nuremburg. The child recognises in the young man her old friend, Nutcracker, who cured himself of his ugliness by killing the King of the Mice. The young man thanks the child for saving his life and good looks.

The Nutcracker play lends itself to an ingenious and imaginative treatment that appeals to the mind of a child. For instance, the godfather illustrates his story of how Nutcracker lost his beauty by a gallant show. Again, the fairyland effects, where everything is sweet, including the lemons, were exceedingly charming and fantastical. The strong colours being just what we associate with Russian decorators.

I cannot help thinking that "Nutcracker" has a communist interest. It rests on a story of the curse of the King of the Mice. There was a king with a young daughter. His castle was overrun with mice. Fearing that they would devour his daughter, he decides to kill them. The King of the Mice warns the other king that if he carries out his intention great harm will befall his daughter. The king, however, lays in a stock of cats who keep the mice busy. One night the child's nurse falls asleep, and the mice bite the child and so cast an evil spell over her. But the curse shall be removed if she marries a handsome prince. This means that the prince receives the curse and becomes Ugly Nutcracker. How the curse is removed is shown in the play. Substitute the Capitalist for the King of the Mice and the Workers for the Prince and Princess and you get a Capital and Labour socialist play.

The Kipling play, with its story of the child who was adopted by animals, is also calculated to appeal to the imaginative child mind. And the environment of forest and jungle contains much to add to the appeal, especially if treated after the State Children's theatre manner, that is to say, simply and imaginatively, with an emphasis on those broad masses and outlines in which a child usually sees objective life. I think a communistic educational side is found in the child's conquest of the animals with live coal. It symbolises the conquest by scientific knowledge of savage nature. It exhibits, too, the kindly nature of the wolf in contrast to the different picture offered by "Little Red Riding Hood."

A version of Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island"



THE STATE CHILDREN'S THEATRE: MOSCOW.

*The Jungle Tales*, by Kipling, as adapted and produced by Madame Pascal. The same characteristics as in *Tom Sawyer* are present. The keynote is romantic realism. The scene is simple and appropriate in colour and design to the animal characteristics.





## THE CHILDREN'S THEATRE

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was produced last summer. I think Madam Pascal wrote a play about "Treasure Island." It was not the original "Island." The play was well done, especially the setting of the deck of the full-rigged ship. But alas! it had three performances only. The Soviet Government did not like it. They considered its sort of piracy and an island full of loot unsuited to children. Their aim is to kill pirates without mercy, and not make fairy stories out of their wicked doings.

Among the few interesting plays which form the repertory of the theatre is an adaptation of Mark Twain's "Tom Sawyer." This piece is easily first favourite. I was told that there is not a Russian child who does not know "Tom Sawyer." If it is true, it says much for the intelligence of the Russian children.

Attached to the State Children's theatre is a Green Room Club, the object of which is to bring children together, and to provide a centre for creative work in all departments of theatrical activity. At the first performance of "Treasure Island," this club gave an exhibition of its varied activities, using the theatre vestibule and rehearsal rooms for the purpose. One saw models and sketches for scenes, a large variety of dolls representing characters, piles of children's letters criticising performances, manuscripts of plays written by children, and many other exhibits, testifying to the extreme activity and ability of the children of the theatre.

The increased interest in children's theatricals during the last five years has led several directors of established theatres in Moscow and Petrograd to organise special performances for children. It should be said that all the children's performances in Russia fall under two heads. There are the performances in which children take part as spectators only. For instance, the State Children's theatre and Moscow Children's theatre. And there are the performances in which children take part as authors, producers, actors, and spectators. Occasionally there is a production by children at one of the established theatres when pantomime or spectacle is presented. I saw a fairy tale "presented" by children at one of the Ermitage group of theatres. They made the costumes and scenery, and thereby showed that they had an astonishing conception of the requirements of an imaginative play, and

## THE CENTRE GROUP

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were really little masters in the business of getting the dramatic spirit over the footlights.

Children are encouraged not only to form clubs of their own, but to participate in the theatrical work of trade union clubs. Here is an illustration of club co-operation. At one of the Moscow clubs, at a time when a meeting of trade union delegates was being held, a spectacle was performed in which workers' and peasants' children took part. It was preceded by two ballet spectacles performed by the pupils of a ballet studio belonging to the trade union clubs. The children gave a first-class rendering of "The Butterfly and the Grasshopper" and "The Dance of Dolls." This was followed by an "Apotheosis of the October Revolution," consisting of four pictures in which the workers of the Red Rose Factory took part, assisted by all present. The prologue was "Before the War." There was a blacksmith's shop, and in the red glare of the forge one saw exhausted blacksmiths and peasants. The second picture was the February Revolution. One saw revolutionary symbols and effects. Chains fell off peasants and workers, who were now holding sickles and hammers. In front of the stage was a table covered with red, containing the portraits of Lenin and Marx. The next two scenes worked towards the final stage of the apotheosis, in which the children among the audience took part. Doors at the back opened, revealing a transformation scene. There was a procession of little peasants with sickles and bunches of rye, and little workers with hammers. They all marched from their seats to the shrine formed by the table with the two portraits where they crossed sickles and hammers, and in this and other ways paid homage to the two leaders, the new gods. Finally all the spectators rose and assisted in the concluding scene. The proceedings ended with the singing of the "International" by all present.

In children's clubs and gymnasias, of which there are many in Moscow and Petrograd, the theatricals are entirely conducted by children. The audiences are very critical, and this may partly account for the high standard of the performances. When left to themselves, the Russian children seem to prefer satirical plays. On two or three occasions I saw them give excellent performances of Ostrovsky's satires

There are the theatres belonging to the children's colonies

## THE CHILDREN'S THEATRE

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in various parts of Russia which are liberally supplied with theatrical performances. There are the Forest and other school theatres. Hardly a school but has its dramatic and dancing classes and its stage owing to the effort of the Educational Department to make theatrical performances a permanent feature of school life. And there are the theatricals in the homes of the children and in the Children's Homes founded by the Relief Missions in the heart of the great famine district. I have witnessed in the famine district several performances of self-made plays in which many old Russian folk songs and dances are introduced, and this at a time when the peasants were dying in thousands of starvation and disease. Whenever I went with relief workers with food to Suchka Rechka, lying at the foot of the Urals, the children of the Home established there would sing and dance and perform plays. They were very fond of the "Princess and the Knight," a dance in which the Prince is finally humiliated. And they usually sang a funny song called "Cooking Beer." Further they had quite a strong repertory of revolutionary songs, which they invariably reeled off in spite of their empty stomachs.

The organisation and methods of all these activities are much the same. Children are taught the principles of the Left Group theatre. That is to say, they are being initiated into the "mysteries" of constructionism, bio-mechanics, and other systems of brain and body discipline approved by the new monarch—King Machine. Both in and out of the theatre the youth of Russia are being encouraged to build themselves on the new communistic scientific plan. They are expected to form a new race under the vital touch of science, sport and play. On the whole, they are proud of their citizen rights, and their enthusiasm for their new gods touches high-water mark, especially in the matter of time, ability, and zeal which they devote to the ritual in the theatre

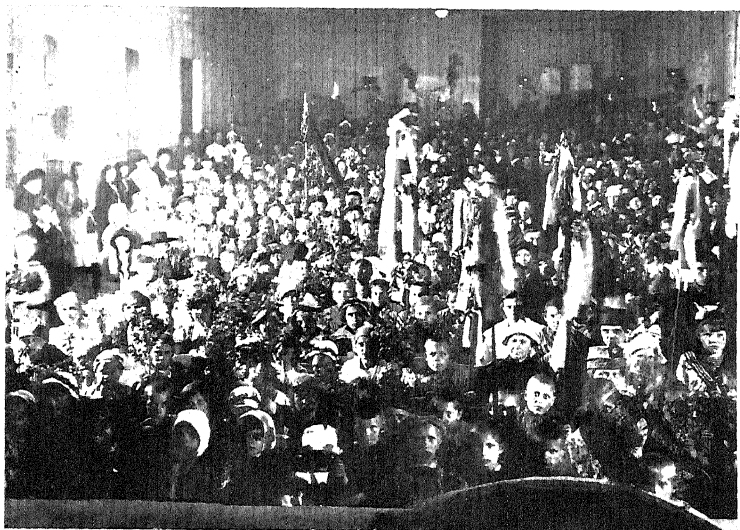
## CHAPTER XVII

### *THE CENTRE GROUP (Continued)*

#### (vi) THE STATE CIRCUS

SINCE the Revolution there has been an attempt to establish a State Circus. With characteristic energy, the Government has laid the foundations of a new structure by closing the variety houses and throwing the circus open for semi-variety and theatrical exhibitions, including revues and pantomimes. This action has probably led to the circus taking first place as a source of influence upon the Left theatre and all the groups directly or indirectly interested in its work. The pre-war men of the theatre usually went to the theatre for their technical ideas. The post-revolution men of the theatre go to the Circus. The result is that the Circus ideas have invaded the theatre to such an extent that it is generally thought a new period in the history of the theatre has been reached. The theatre is about to be transferred to the Circus.

The reason for the popularity of the Circus with the workers is not hard to find. The art form of the Circus is the victory of human genius over the material medium. It stands for the truth of unadorned human skill and not for the make-believe of the theatre. The Circus and its form and technique are more suited to the requirements of the proletariat than the theatre and its objects and agents. In the first place, the Circus material is not cumbered with metaphysics, philosophy, psychology, and the rest of the high-brow theatre stuff. Its means are not composed of the crudities of scientific thought which clog up the way through which plays in Western Europe and America have to pass. Everything about it approximates to the Machine idea, with which the Russian worker is



THE STATE CHILDREN'S THEATRE: MOSCOW.

Above is an example of a play written, produced and played by children. It has a simple and appropriate setting such as belongs to a child's mind. Below is a child audience at a gala performance at the State Children's Theatre. It has the true festival spirit shown in evergreens, banners and streamers found in the open-air demonstrations.



## THE STATE CIRCUS

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enamoured. It has an ideal form of stage and auditorium which automatically solve the perplexing problem of sight line, and showing the actor in the round or three dimensionally. All its sight lines are correct, and every part of the performance is seen. It has also highly-trained performers, whose expression is organised precisely on those lines which the worker-actor seeks to follow, and who are therefore capable of giving the latter an excellent idea of what extreme physical training is and what it can do in the matter of promoting sternly organised performance. The Circus performance, whether by trapeze artiste, juggler, acrobat, wrestler, boxer, bareback rider, or any other, is actually a synthesis of play, acting, and scenery. The performer is author, actor, and decorator in one. He combines the best principles and qualities of expression. Take a balancing act, every part of the balancer acts—every part is keyed up to sustain a particular movement at a particular moment. Everything must be right. The least fault, even so little as a hair's breadth, would hurl the performer to death. Moreover, he evokes his own scenery, as it were. He surrounds himself with an air of intensity which blots out everything else. Watching him, we are conscious of nothing but the creative act in which his trained and tamed output of emotion and energy clothe him. If he be a highly-trained clown, it is the exuberant drollery and fancy which cover him as with an ever-changing plastic form.

Studio artists have long found inspiration in the Circus. The most sensitive philosophers and writers have always acknowledged the pre-eminence of the pure form of art of the Circus over the artifice of the theatre. Look how Gautier praised Oriel the clown. Now it is the turn of actors and their co-operators. Perhaps the new theatrical possibilities of the Circus is one more discovery to the credit of Soviet Russia. These possibilities are:—

- 1, A new species of speechless drama; 2, A new form of arena stage; 3, A new system of acting which permits of actors weaving plays out of themselves; 4, Style transferred from the scenery to the actor. In sum, the theatrical gramophone replaced by the human actor.

The Government are paying the greatest attention to the Circus. In response to public demand they are admitting

## THE CENTRE GROUP

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circus performers from different countries, and making it worth their while to come. The Moscow State circus director makes personal visits to Berlin, Frankfort, Hamburg, Vienna, and other centres to engage artistes. Special facilities are granted to these artistes. The Soviet Government pay fares both ways. They pay salaries in dollars. The artistes receive every consideration, including free lodgings and free Sundays, without reduction of salary. The Russian Foreign Office allows the Circus director freedom of choice, and the visa requirements for the artistes so engaged are different from those for other persons. But at present the prospect of engaging many foreign artistes is rather limited, because the municipal circuses have fallen on rather bad times. Owing to changed economic conditions, whereby the Government have been compelled to cease subsidising many places of entertainment, these particular circuses are now self-supporting, and unable to pay the heavy salaries demanded by foreigners. All the same, those in command of the Circus activities view things very hopefully. They believe that Russia is about to become the new El Dorado of the Circus performer. Some persons outside the Circus think this will be when the variety theatres are allowed to open. At present they are all closed.

There is nothing to be said with regard to the organisation and methods of the circus. They reveal no startling new features. The State circus has about twenty new productions ("turns") every month. Here is a typical programme. It is that of the first Government Circus, Moscow.

### *First part.*

1. Trained horses.
2. Acrobatic dancers.
3. Gymnasts.
4. Musical eccentrics.
5. Eccentric gymnasts.
6. Double horseback jockey act.
7. Comic clown act.

### *Second part.*

8. Gladiators.
9. Group of trained horses.
10. Satirical clown and contortionist.



## THE STATE CIRCUS

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### *Entre Act.*

11. Performing mountain eagles.
12. The Fool and his Majesty the People
13. Horseback turn.

Sometimes there is a revue similar to what is performed in the German Circus, and sometimes a very good pantomime of a social character. Turn 12 in the above programme is evidently a sop in the pan for the workers. A new King and Court Jester of olden times. The programme is a clean one, and is made up of an exhibition of physical skill on the part of men and horses. But it must be borne in mind that this section of the New theatre, primitive though its programme looks, has the old, old call of human beauty in action, of romantic heroism by which it exercises the most powerful influence on all other sections.



THE STATE CIRCUS. A form of stage that is strongly influencing the New Russian Theatre.

## CHAPTER XVIII

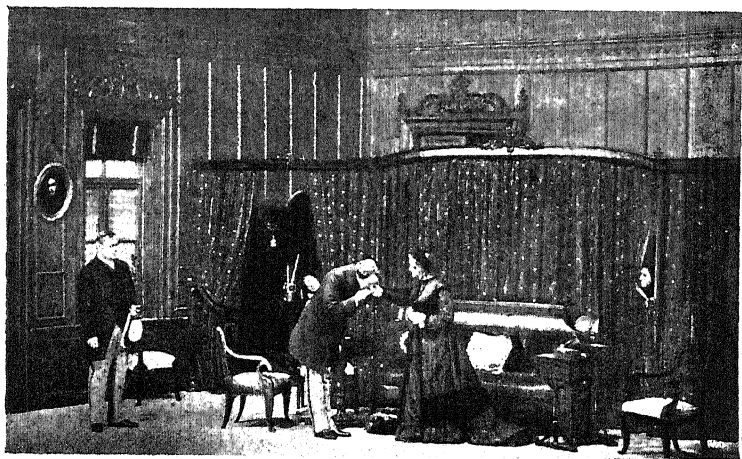
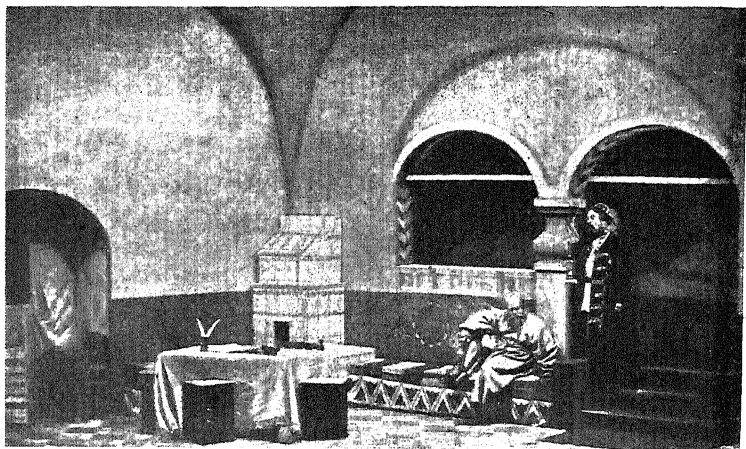
### *THE RIGHT GROUP*

#### (i) STANISLAVSKY'S THEATRE

**S**TANISLAVSKY'S theatre is representative of the Right Group. In a manner of speaking, it is reactionary. It is inclined towards pre-Revolution traditions. It does not welcome radical thought, and does not express political, social and revolutionary propaganda except in an unintentional way. The plays which it exhibits to-day may be said to contain revolutionary and communist propaganda. But the perception of this is due to the particular state of the Russian mind. Tolstoy's "Tsar Feodor" holds kingcraft up to ridicule, but it needs a communistic audience fully to appreciate this expression.

To understand the present position and value of the Moscow Art theatre it is necessary to return to beginnings. It was shown in the chapter on "The Three Personalities" that the Moscow Art theatre largely embodies the characteristics of Stanislavsky, and as he has been unable to change his characteristics, or to extend his individuality during the revolutionary period, he and his theatre have remained practically unaltered. Both have been unable to change their bourgeois modes for radical ones except in an almost negligible way. Both, therefore, have ceased making history. But they form an interesting historical landmark.

This theatre had its origin in the ambitions of Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Dantchenko and the activities of the company of amateurs drawn from the upper-middle class, sons of rich merchants, wives of generals, politicians, and the rest. It represented a revolt against the existing theatrical and dramatic



## THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE.

Above:—*Tsar Feodor*, by Count Alexis Tolstoi, as produced in 1898. The scene is an actualistic representation of an interior in the old Kremlin. This form of old-fashioned actualism is dead in Russia. Below:—*Enough Stupidity in every Wise Man*, by Ostrovsky. Compare this actualistic treatment with the highly original Proletcult Theatre treatment given elsewhere. Two plays now being given on tour.



## STANISLAVSKY'S THEATRE

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order. The theatrical tendencies of the times were of a degrading and anti-national character. Plays were bad, acting was worse, and staging presented no brighter picture. Thoroughly distressed by this state of things, Dantchenko and Stanislavsky, the one a business man, a dramatic author of repute, and a reformer of musical and dramatic education; the other with business training and a passionate theatrical amateur, decided to retaliate with a rather strong dose of the Saxe-Meiningen Court Company system.<sup>1</sup> This famous system, evolved by Duke George of Saxe-Meiningen, at the Meiningen theatre, was at its height between 1874 and 1890. The Meiningen Company produced a great effect by their system throughout Europe. Their ideas of crowd effects, speech, scenery, decoration, and, above all, the perfection of ensemble, contributed to the reform of the stage, in particular, in England, Germany and Russia. The system aimed mainly at effects by minute realism. It aimed to make the "scene" and everything in it a correct historical reproduction. It set the scenic artist, the costumier and the actor faithfully reproducing things in detail. In addition, it paid great attention to the spoken word, to the management of the stage-crowd, to bringing the actors into harmony with each other, and the acting into harmony with the scenery.

In these particulars the Meiningen system exerted a powerful influence over Stanislavsky and his distinguished partner. The experiment which they proposed to try at the Moscow Art theatre, and which they believed was calculated to ease the situation, was really a Russian copy of the one which George II of Meiningen carried out. The policy of reform outlined by them, and supported by their band of enthusiastic amateurs, was to raise the tone of plays by selecting only noble ones; to improve acting and the actor's mentality by introducing a system of round-table study of plays; to introduce a more natural method of speaking; to subordinate the individual actor to the ensemble or whole, and to produce correct atmosphere as far as possible by careful attention to actual details, that is, to minute realism.

It is worthy of note here that their first play, the play that opened the Moscow Art theatre in 1898, "Tsar Feodor

<sup>1</sup> "The Theatre of Max Reinhardt," by Huntly Carter.

## THE RIGHT GROUP

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Ivanovitch," is now being played on tour in Germany and America by the Moscow Art theatre company under the direction of Stanislavsky. The production exhibits the very reform features that were introduced on the opening night twenty-five years ago. The scenery, dilapidated though it is, reproduces Byzantine settings as precisely as exteriors and interiors of the kind are reconstructed in an art museum. Not only is there a faithful imitation of ancient interiors copied with museum hair for hair fidelity, but an exact representation of the social manners and costumes of the times, and, above all, the perfection of detail of gestures and movements calculated no doubt to contribute to the desired atmosphere. This was the sort of thing that made the Moscow Art theatre at first sensational and afterwards famous. And it is the thing, too, which has closed its active career. So much for the historical value of the play and its production. I have said that its contemporary value, that is, its value to the new theatre lies in its communistic meaning. I will come to this presently.

Much might be said of the conception of the organisation and of the application of principles of this theatre, and of the circumstances and elements that contributed to its building up. But there is not much to be said that is new in these respects.

From 1898 to 1914 the perfect agreement between the two men produced results that considerably influenced the Russian theatre of that period. Their modification of the commercial interest, war on routine, refusal to make concessions to a depraved public taste or indeed any concessions, their re-establishment of the literary side of the theatre by the re-introduction of plays of the highest quality and ideals, the introduction to the theatre of fresh blood in the form of young, enthusiastic and talented amateurs untouched by professionalism, students of Nemirovitch-Dantchenko and followers of Stanislavsky, and the formation thereby of a body of adherents professing almost a religious faith in the theatre and its directors, willing, in fact, to subordinate personal interests, to sacrifice even their own good to the Cause—all this served to foster a powerful will of the theatre that was bound to extend and to make itself felt in ever-increasing circles. In addition, the serious aims and work of the theatre attracted the support of wealthy Moscow

## STANISLAVSKY'S THEATRE

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business men, who were citizens in the true sense that they desired to support a worthy experiment for the sake of the service rendered by it to civic and national forms of art, and not for that of profit.

By these means, then, the Moscow Art theatre made careful contributions to the reform of the Russian theatre during the early years of the twentieth century. What contributions has it made since, particularly to the new Russian theatre, with its demands for a radical subject and method of interpretation and representation? Of what value was this new theatrical and rather precious mentality, so to speak, built up with such care, to Russia at a moment of terrible revolutionary pressure, which demanded a theatre and a form of drama to serve as a haven of extreme radical thought and action, and as an interpreter and disseminator of entirely new values? It was a moment when the sudden solidarity and defiant liberation of the workers, the soaring aspirations of those who but yesterday were slaving ambitionless in the bowels of the earth, the release of insurgent poets and writers embodying the new spirit of social change, the spiritual renewal that seeks dramatic and artistic expression, most certainly called for a living form of stage—a stage resting on life values and not æsthetic ones. That is to say, a life-centred one.

If we examine the conception and work of the M.A.T. we shall find that they place particular emphasis on art expression, on acting, on painstaking preparation for representation, on stage unity, and on short runs or the repertory system. Three of these objects are still bearing fruit. The first, art expression, is undergoing a new interpretation, as may be seen in the chapters on the Left Group theatre. It is not quite clear whether the M.A.T. was conceived of as a form of art expression or as an acting centre. Did art or acting come first in the minds of the originators when they sat for eighteen hours, so the legend runs, hatching their theatre, and discussing and deciding its form and policy? The name, "Moscow Art theatre," seems to suggest that the theatre was intended to be above all things an art theatre; no doubt, as a protest against the existing theatres that were not art theatres. And authors and actors, and all its objects and agents of representation and interpretation, would be expected to rid themselves of inartistic tendencies

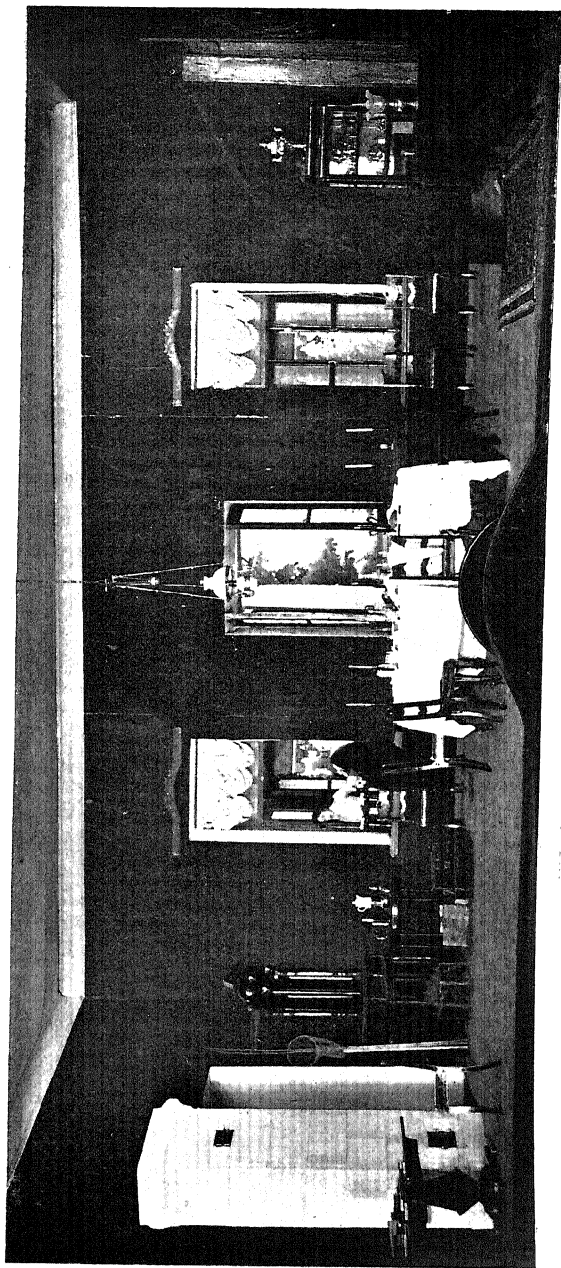
## THE RIGHT GROUP

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and devote themselves to the service of the new god. Doubtless "art" was used as a distinguishing feature. It was meant to indicate the form of expression peculiar to the theatre. As we now know, the theatre has shown throughout a remarkable fidelity to a form of expression which in Stanislavsky's view most fully transmits a certain form of dramatic experience. The expression is realism, or, more correctly, actualism. By adding principles of art, among them unity, continuity, rhythm, we get the curious mixture known as "spiritual realism," a contradictory and meaningless thing with which uncritical admirers of the Moscow Art theatre's work are apt to hypnotise themselves.

While the two business-like promoters of the theatre were fixing its general atmosphere with a catch-penny phrase nowadays so popular with a certain class of commercial-minded enthusiast who seeks a title that looks like the encouragement of national and international forms of drama, they were also deciding a staple form of interpretation which would remain long after the original ephemeral artistic veneer had worn off, and in times of emergency could seek shelter and sustenance in foreign countries possessing tolerable theatres. I think it is correct to say that they conceived of their theatre, first of all, as an acting place. Everything points to the fact that they put acting first, and that they have always done their best to secure genius and the best acting talent for the stage. Look at the vestiges of this famous theatrical company now on tour in Europe and America. What do you find? Very little except the acting. Everywhere they go the acting is loudly acclaimed by critics. The rest of the "spiritual realism" stuff, the trappings and trimmings of representation are ignored. And no wonder, for they hang about the acting like depressed bargains at a rag sale. Both Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Dantchenko had a just admiration for acting. And we may believe that acting came first with them, and everything was designed to proceed from that. With what result? Let us trace the course of the Russian theatre since the inception of the M.A.T., and we shall find that acting has become the centre of interest. To-day in every Russian playhouse acting comes first and the rest proceeds from it. Acting is a characteristic that distinguishes the new Russian theatre





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*The Seagull*, by Chekov. Act III. One of the censored plays, which has not been seen since the Revolution. The scene is another example of uninspired actualism.



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from all other contemporary theatres. The emphasis on the value of acting is a contribution from the M.A.T.

Other contributions appear in:—(1) The survival of the system of actor training. The new theatre follows the round-table method of study. A section of it, the Jewish and Kamerny theatres, devote two and three years to the production of a play. (2) The high standard of production. This, too, is followed even in the revolutionary and proletcult theatres. (3) Repertory system intended to abolish the long run system. Also general in the new theatre. (4) Ideas of unity. The search for unity actuates every part of the new theatre. But, of course, the form of unity varies. The M.A.T. may be said to have been conceived of, secondly, as a unified world of actuality. That is, it was to be a place of objective interpretation and representation. All parts of a production were to be united, all on the stage were to be bound together by a sequence of actual facts. The world thus to be produced was a world in itself. We might call it Stanislavsky's world. This world as it appeared was separated from the audience. It expressed an actual illusion (paradoxically speaking) which the spectator did not share. Of course, this is unity in disunity. Perhaps the proper name for it is stage-unity. There are, in fact, several forms of unity in the theatre, subjective and objective, which need not be gone into at this point. I mean theatre forms and stage forms, that is, ensemble acting, atmosphere, etc., objective and subjective. What came of the M.A.T.'s attention to stage-unity was a general interest in the theory and practice of unity and developments in different directions. For instance, Meierhold's attempt to make the actor the perfect intermediary between the author and his experience and the spectator open to receive the experience, with the intention, no doubt, of causing the author and the spectator to unite in a final effort to rid themselves of an unsatisfactory deputy. Meierhold's search for the missing link of theatrical unity reminds one of Darwin's search for the missing link of animal continuity.

The organisation of the Moscow Art theatre has been justly praised. It introduced a new note into the spiritual or interpretative side and the economic or administrative side of the theatre. Nemirovitch-Dantchenko represented the economic

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or business side; Stanislavsky, the spiritual. The first attended to the financial and literary matters, chose the plays, defined their meanings, settled their treatment and characters; Stanislavsky did the rest, arranged the acting, setting, and other artistic details. On the economic side rules and regulations were drawn up for the security of the theatre, of the shareholding actors and staff, of the Council, and of the public who were in any way pledged to its support. On the spiritual side, rules and regulations for the training, conduct, and behaviour of the players. The theatre was founded on a sound business basis, and the statutes of the co-operative society which it really formed were similar in structure to those which govern and defend many sound business and corporate enterprises. There is no need to go into the details of the objects, rights, and responsibilities of this co-operative society; its composition, and the rights and obligations of its numbers; its resources. The business of the general meetings, the composition and function of the Council, and the direction were on the line of most business corporations and limited liability companies.

The constitution was an effective instrument for putting the M.A.T. on its feet and keeping it there till a revolution or an earthquake came. Doubtless it would serve the useful purpose of putting similar undertakings on a fairly sound business basis. But we are not concerned here with the question of establishing new theatres on financial co-operative, limited liability and patented structures. The thing to be considered is of what use was this particular structure to the M.A.T. after the Revolution? What has it contributed to theatrical concerns since this event? Was it able to perform its function after the Revolution, and, if so, to what extent?

Without looking at actual events, it is easy to form the opinion that it would not function under the Soviet form of Government and civil code. In the first place, it was a structure that belonged to the promoters of free competition in theatricals, and not to a monopoly such as the nationalisation of theatres by the Soviet Government actually amounted to. In the second place, it rested on a financial basis, members of the administration took shares and capital for the upkeep and working of the theatre was subscribed by public interested in the undertaking, and there were dividends. The New Russian theatre

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has a non-financial basis agreeing with Marxian principle. It was designed to be organised on the soviet system.

Actual events show that the M.A.T. organisation underwent several changes on the economic side, as the Revolution turned the working-class into the dominant class, completely overturned the relations between business concerns and the shareholding public and the idea of workers' control arose and was realised. Here are the stages of the changes. (1) Land, houses and factories were nationalised in turn. There was an interval between each, and for the first few months of the Revolution the M.A.T. organisation was unaffected. With the nationalisation of houses all the theatres were requisitioned by the Government, workers' control was put into operation, there was a radical change in the basis of economic policy, trade-unionism became compulsory and general, and all engaged in the theatre became automatically members of the All-Russia Union of Art Workers.<sup>1</sup> (2) With nationalisation the M.A.T. shareholders disappeared, and the money they had invested disappeared also. The shares fixed at from 4,000 to 8,000 roubles became worthless, and thus this detail of the organisation of the M.A.T. co-operative society ceased to have effect. The status of the actor changed. Under the new industrial conditions he became a worker and a trade-unionist. Economically he was supported by the Government in return for a certain amount of work, receiving food, clothing, and shelter in exchange for his expenditure of theatrical activity. So instead of being a member of the corporate body of the M.A.T. and receiving a part of its financial life-blood in the form of dividend-bearing shares in proportion to his ability, he became part of the new State machine designed to change the Russian people from a subject race to a citizen race. Instead of being expected to take part in a theatrical exhibition which was a mere illusion, he was expected to distribute his energies throughout all fields of human activity to which they belonged. He was to play in the theatre, in the street, in the market-place, wherever the new idea of social service took him. In short, instead of being a standardised living lie produced by the play-going public and the capitalised form of theatre, he was to be a human being, owning his mind and soul as far as it is possible to do so on

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix C.

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earth. (3) The no-money period when salaries, box-office taking and money payments of all kinds disappeared. A system of tickets was introduced. The tickets were handed over to the trade unions and by them distributed to the worker-public. By this time the old theatrical economic organisation had gone completely overboard. Shareholders, dividend-hunters, wage-earning players, salaried directors, chartered theatrical undertakings resting on lawyers, and designed to acquire vast properties and premises necessary for their financial operations, all these vanished into thin air and with the sound of much lamentation. (4) Then came the new economic policy period, when the Government finding itself no longer able to support all the members of its vast household, began to turn them out of doors to shift for themselves. Permission was given for the re-opening of theatres under private management. The M.A.T. re-opened its box-office and salary list and resumed its financial organisation; but no longer on the old basis. By this time no one in Russia had any money except for hand-to-mouth purposes. All that the M.A.T. had for its upkeep and working expenses, including rent to the Government, was the payment for seats and a small subsidy from the Government, in return for which the latter received a number of seat tickets. To-day the Moscow Art theatre lives on its takings and the Government subsidy. Its original economic organisation has practically disappeared. Whether this will ever return depends on many things, among them the return of Russia to a former system of capitalising business undertakings and the capacity of the M.A.T. to live long enough to participate in that event. Everything considered, it may be said that the M.A.T. system of economic organisation has not contributed to the new theatre.

A different fate has befallen the spiritual organisation. With certain modifications, it has survived the struggle and shock of the Revolution and played a useful part in calling attention to reforms and the need of them. The system of acting and actor training has not been interfered with. The selection of plays has passed from the absolute control of Nemirovitch-Dantchenko to that of a committee, at first wholly, and later partly composed of Government representatives. This, of course, does not interfere with the quality of the work chosen. Experi-

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ment and production of new plays have been interfered with by economic conditions and by the requirements of the new working-class audience. Generally speaking, the kind of play upon which the M.A.T. had developed its methods, and to which these methods were most suited, was not the kind of play that a radical audience liked. Before the war it built up a repertory and the essential interpretative machinery to suit the times and the peculiar stage of development which the theatre was undergoing in all countries. When the Revolution came, and the Mother Hubbard directors went to the cupboard to give the revolution dog a bone, they found it bare.

It may be said, then, that the "interpretative" principles which the M.A.T. developed during its pre-war period were not destroyed by the Revolution and after events. But they were operated upon to some extent by the new audience. The audience demanded radical thought and action. The only response the M.A.T. was capable of making was the adaptation of its stock-in-trade to the requirements of the moment. An illustration of the sort of adaptation that took place is provided by the comparative list of plays printed elsewhere in this book. The fact of the matter is that the principles of a subtle realism and the verbal analysis of nineteenth century psychological states to which the M.A.T. had obstinately pledged itself, were of no practical value to people seeking a way out of the confusion caused by the Revolution and anxious to learn the truth of the new social life which they felt quickening in their soul, and demanding to be expressed by every means in their power. The Moscow Art theatre, with its Tchekovian impermanent atmosphere and its preoccupation with the analytical verbal cinematography of "The Three Sisters," "Uncle Vania," and "The Cherry Orchard," is out of the main current of contemporary affairs. Its exhibition of the sentiments aroused by the doings and sufferings of personages born in another age, as it were, and actuated by complex experiences foreign to the present one, is valueless to an audience that wants its mind drawn inwards upon its own problems and then reflected outwards to the wider and practical process of solving them. Who among a present-day Russian audience has the patience to sit and watch a little Tchekovian group hard at work producing an atmosphere by difference of tone and gesture, and

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speaking to an atmosphere which they have produced, which is rather an atmosphere of moonshine than sunrise, a moonlit seagull haunted space, and not the vigorous dawn of a new life?

Much the same may be said of the variations of this and the actualistic atmosphere generally. As is well known, the Moscow Art theatre made some experiments in psychological and symbolical representation. For instance, at a moment when literary symbolism was asserting itself in different parts of Europe, it turned to Maeterlinck. One of the plays selected was the "Blue Bird," which was staged with appropriate symbolism of a kind. But in this and its psychological adventures, it never really departed from its original intention of being actualistic unto the point of actual thunderstorms, including the real thing in rain and thunderbolts. If its first attack of actualism was actual life seen through the photographic eyes of the small Dutch Masters, its psychology was actual life seen through the pathological mind of a personage or a group of personages, while its symbolism was life seen through the fantastic mind of a child. Behind each was the too solid world of actual facts, of man and nature, over which was poured the sticky theatrical solution called art.

Simple and direct passions expressed in action, simple and direct thoughts and ideas exhibiting to the eager imagination the unfolding of a new and wonderful life. Such were felt to be more in tune with the existing conditions. These were the things the Russian people wanted of the theatre. They wanted the revolutionary, social and creative meaning of people and things. What else could be expected? The Revolution had liberated the workers and peasants from the old ruling and employer classes. It had made them think for themselves, perhaps, for the first time in the history of Russia. It had made them conscious of the evil power exerted over them by the old intellectuals and the despotic regime that tried to crush out their life. They hated this power, despised the people who exercised it, and wanted none of the dramatic works that reflected them and their class even remotely. What they asked for was a form of drama that reflected the new pulsating humanised life, as opposed to the life of tyrants, robbers, and parasites who exist on the sufferings of their fellow-men. They asked for a form of drama that expressed the struggle for



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this life, the aspirations and hopes belonging to it, and the radical thought and action that realised it. Chekov of "The Seagull" was no good to them, neither was Andreiev, nor any of the literary and Free theatre tribe who had been so closely occupied with the moods and manners of people they hated. Even Gorky's "Lower Depths" was to be tolerated only for its direct and powerful indictment of the old social system. Here was a picture of outcasts forced into shocking poverty and crime, blighted and crushed by a cruel social environment calculated to make even hell cry "Shame!" But there was Luka, who wanders through the play like a doss-house Solomon Eagle, with his Tolstoy-like sermon on faith, his doctrine of love and forgiveness. The communists did not want him. To them there was no turning of the other cheek to the gang who made Russia what it was in Tsarist times.

What was the effect of this mood on the Moscow Art theatre? I have traced the history of the theatre, considered its conception, organisation and principles, shown how they have contributed to the new theatre, shown, too, the changes wrought on it by the Revolution and the new population. Let me finish this chapter by briefly describing the Moscow Art theatre, its audience, and the representation and meaning of certain plays as I saw them in 1920 and subsequently. Three of the plays, "Tsar Feodor," "Lower Depths," and "Cherry Orchard," are being presented on tour by Stanislavsky and his company. Probably they will come to London, when the long-expected and long-deferred visit of the company takes place. For this reason I will describe them in detail. I might mention that it is not the purpose of this book to give long detailed descriptions of plays that are well known outside Russia. Only those plays that illustrate a new matter and manner, and throw a light on the aspiration which is growing into conscious expression, which affects all present phases of thought and action, and which seeks a social form in the transvaluation of values, call for detailed analysis.

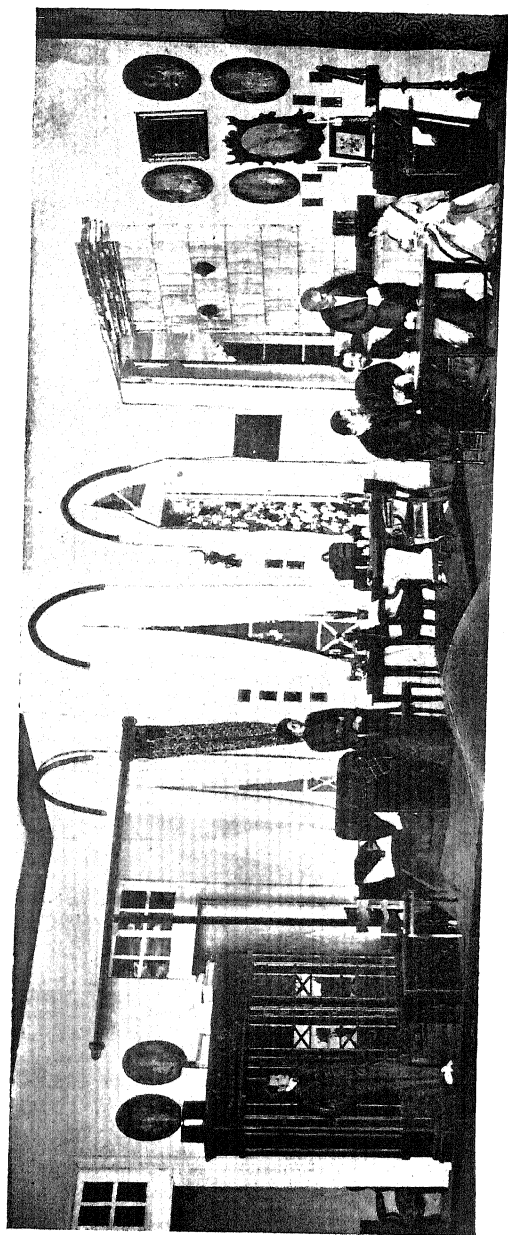
When I re-entered Russia a year or two after the Revolution I was prepared to find a considerable change in the appearance of the theatres and their audiences. I knew perfectly well that public institutions of the kind could not pass through a period of shattering convulsion—a convulsion that was felt at the

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remotest parts of the earth like waves set up by a devastating earthquake—without exhibiting an effect. I was not surprised or disappointed, therefore, when I saw the deplorable condition to which some, at least, of the theatres had been reduced. I say some, because here and there a theatre showed clearly that the far-reaching hand of the man, the Minister of Education and Art, who sought to preserve objects of historical and artistic value, had protected them, if not wholly, at least in great part. This was the case with the State theatres in Moscow and Petrograd, whose magnificent interiors showed few signs of wear and tear in spite of the fact that they had been constantly invaded by the "mob," so to speak, ever since the early days of the Revolution. They had been put to every possible use, as theatres and as forums. They had been garlanded with evergreens and bannerets, hung with flags, almost hidden beneath propaganda posters and inscriptions. They had simply brimmed over at all times with eager, enthusiastic crowds, theatrical, political and the rest. And they had emerged from the continuous fire of this volcanic life with colours flying, to speak literally of the untouched glories of their interior architectural decorations. In short, they had been taken care of.

It was different with certain other theatres. Their damaged interiors, dark and dingy corridors, carpetless staircases, in some cases beautiful, classical vestibules upon whose walls priceless frescoes mouldered, damp-stained and almost unrecognisable, told a sad story of a long fight with overwhelming circumstances. The chapter provided by the auditoriums was not the least sensational. Here were spectator places as dark and depressing as you could find anywhere. They simply gasped for the restoring hands of the upholsterer, builder, and decorator. One sat in the stalls on a crazy seat held together and tied to its neighbour with bits of string. Overhead through a crack or hole in the ceiling the rain fell. The walls were rotten, the floors bare, the boxes draperyless. An electric bulb or two were all that survived of the lighting apparatus. These threw a dim light over everything, reminding me of the effect of the moon under a cloud. The proscenium curtain and scenery were in harmony. They had no reason to crow over the



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*The Cherry Orchard*. Act I. An interior that reminds one of a show-room at a furniture store. The play is tolerated by the new audience on account of the picture it presents of an impotent land-owning middle-class, who are being bought up by the newly-arrived commercial class. It also admits of much clowning.



fitments of the front of the house. In some auditoriums, for instance, those of the Ermitage groups of playhouses, huge propaganda inscriptions were hung athwart the proscenium opening, where they flaunted their messages in active competition with the plays. As a continuation of the propaganda scheme, in the grounds surrounding these theatres were huge decorative blocks of different heights, forming comparative statistical tables, which told the worker at a glance the economic resources of the country, how much he owned in minerals, timber, oil, etc., the increase of production under the soviets, and the maximum production to be attained. As though to complete the misery theatres there were no attendants, programmes or refreshments, while the cloak rooms which were clearly meant as a receptacle for odds and ends of wardrobe, were occupied by gentlemen in tin helmets, who evidently mistook them for guardrooms.

Happily these conditions have disappeared. When I saw the Ermitage block of entertainment buildings this year they greeted me with a smile. They were looking quite spick and span in two coats of new paint. Gone were the propaganda decorations. The grass plots in the spacious grounds had had a strong dose of seeds and were convalescent. The old white-fronted waiters had returned, and at night the electric light was so blinding that you had to wear smoked glasses. To add to your delirium, there was real beer on draught and in bottle at thirty million roubles a go. And in one of the theatres there was a comic opera silly enough to make the fortune of a London theatre. Such an outburst of bourgeois joy there never was.

The Moscow Art theatre escaped the brunt of the battle. By the end of 1919, when the reorganisation of the theatres took place in earnest, together with other old established theatres, the M.A.T. began to labour under difficulties mainly for the reason already stated. They had nothing but their old repertory to play. They continued to play this, expecting every moment to be closed. The M.A.T. was not, however, subject to any aggravating interference. It was able to keep up appearances to such a degree that in 1921, when the tide of control began to turn, it could still shew a clean auditorium, with very few traces, indeed, of dilapidation. It is true the

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auditorium was only partly lighted, many of the lamps being out of action. But the severe comfort of this old-fashioned two-galleried auditorium was unaffected. And the symbolic Seagull still pursued its eternal course across the tasteful brown act-drop. The scenery was old, dilapidated, and ineffective. There were no wings or side curtains to screen the stage walls. I noticed certain effects of time and circumstance similar to those which I had seen in the German, Austrian, Hungarian, Polish, and other European theatres that were suffering rather badly from lack of money. The great cost of modern clothes prevented them from playing present-day pieces, and their repertory consisted almost entirely of costume plays. Present-day plays presented by the M.A.T. were on the whole shabbily "dressed." The actors at the time had been receiving a small salary from the Government which was inadequate to cover the bare cost of living. As a consequence, they were obliged to try and supplement their meagre income by going round on lorries with a portable stage to factories, barracks, and other places where they received payment in kind, meat, sugar, flour, odds and ends of clothes. In the circumstance, fashionable modern dress on the stage was out of question. The prevailing shabbiness spread like a cloud over scenery and properties. If the actors appeared like out-of-work supers, the chairs and tables and draperies looked as if they had come out of a down-at-heel jumble sale. Of course, there were many stage economies apparent. The leading gentleman could no longer afford to put on a fat cigar when he wished to appear extra impressive. He was limited to a comparatively harmless stage cigarette. Even this agent of realistic expression had to be strictly economised. A few whiffs, then it was laid aside for the next scene. It was like getting your stage effects in weekly instalments. As for the incessant eating and drinking, which have become an indispensable feature of modern society plays owing to the amount of vapid talk which requires tea or strong drink to wash it down, that suffered a bad relapse. The real things in edibles and potables were famine price and not to be dreamt of for stage consumption, while the substitutes were so bad that even a deboshed Hottentot would turn pale at the smell of them. To make matters worse, the Moscow Art theatre's minute realism

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demanded absolutely real things. Thus, their absence, or any attempt to symbolise them Japanese fashion, only covered the performers with ridicule. There is no more pathetic sight than the realistic actor deprived of his real "props." Not a detail of the scene, not a line of the face, not a movement or gesture, no variation or flexibility of the muscle, not the slightest expression or means of expression must be missing if he is to give effective life to the realistic conception of the author and garner good fame and renown.

The new audience also came into my category of the odd and unusual things at the M.A.T. I am glad to say that this audience was no monster such as the anti-Russian papers have pictured it. I saw none of the revolutionary ruffians like those who practically sacked the Buda-Pesth National theatre, tore down its fine curtains of silk and velvet, ripped the coverings off the seats, stole whatever they could lay their hands on, and altogether conducted themselves like savage Ya-hoos at their annual beanfeast. On the whole, the spectators were a grave-faced lot, soberly dressed, some shabbily. Many wore blouses and top-boots and soviet badges, and this gave the audience the air of the better working-class. There was no one in evening dress or wearing jewels. A number sat with their eyes fixed on the leading articles and news stories of the "Isvestia" and the "Pravda." But they read nothing about football or racing, or grew excited over the necks and backs and ankles of pretty flappers advertising somebody's stockings or soap or nose powders in the commercial way. For there was none of this commercial kind of romance in the Government and trade union owned papers of the day. The spectators were mostly young people, workers and students, forming the new intelligentsia, with a sprinkling of the old bourgeois turned radicals. When the interval came they rose in a body, trooped into the corridors, and sought the spacious picture-lined vestibule, where they marched solemnly round and round, very much like owls doing a half mile constitutional, which, by the way, is a custom common to Russian audiences. At the close of the interval they returned to their seats for a fresh helping of their 500,000 roubles-worth of realism. Prices at that time varied from 300,000 roubles for the cheap seats to 500,000 roubles for the best ones. The monthly expenses, I heard, were about

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320 million roubles. They were met partly by takings, partly by subsidy. Here was a return to class distinction. While one man could only afford a pennorth of comfort, another could indulge in twopennorth. The distinction, however, was not outwardly apparent, for the blouses and top-boots were in the boxes and front row of the stalls as well as in the gallery. I noticed much missing, there were no aristocrats or wealthy middle class, no attendants, no programmes, no refreshments, no curtain calls, and no applause. The two latter are old customs at this theatre.

At this time I saw four plays and one comic opera of renown. There was Ostrovsky's "Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man." This satire has been amazingly popular in Russia since the Revolution. At the Workers' theatre it has been used as a framework for a biting satire on current events and people. Indeed, the whole of Ostrovsky's varied and national repertory has been popular. Its careful pictures of upstart petty officials, peasants, and shopkeepers with their rough and uncouth manners and attacks made through them on the merchant and employing class in Petrograd and Moscow during the middle of the last century, seem to have caught the favour of the workers and the peasants. I remember attending a performance of one of Ostrovsky's plays given in a theatre in one of the black zones of the famine area. The theatre was crowded with a starving, cholera, and typhus infected audience that sat from 8 p.m. to 2 a.m. intently following the action. Outside people were dropping dead of starvation and disease like rotten sheep. In the deserted streets were mounds of corpses, and down by the river, not far off, were rows and rows of yawning graves half filled with bodies and waiting for more. Afar off in Moscow, over the Moscow Art theatre, hovered the white Seagull, and here in Buzuluk, over the wooden theatre in the park, hovered the black carrion crow of death. One may believe that the Russian people, particularly the peasants, are dramatic to the core. "Enough Stupidity" deals with the efforts of Dmitrich Glumoff to marry money. He nearly succeeds in attaining his object in Sophia Turusina after having reached her on the stepping stones of one acquaintance after the other. One of his early flames, however, steps in and spoils the game by revealing his plans to the woman he seeks



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to marry. The latter studies his diary, sent to her for the purpose, works out its intrigues, and cries off.

The second play was Knud Hamsun's "In the Claws of Life," with its Scandinavian realism suited to the methods of the M.A.T. and its compromising attitude towards life, suited to the taste of the new audience. The opera was Lecocq's "Daughter of Madame Angot," with its revolutionary content and comic opera way of expressing it. I think the audience enjoyed this bright stuff. I do not know whether they considered it a concession to the new spirit. At any rate, it shows the stupidity of the bourgeoisie, and is a people's opera in more ways than one. It was not as well played as it might have been. To me the players appeared tired. They were not nearly so good as the members of the First Studio, who played it a year later when Stanislavsky and his M.A.T. Company were away from home. The scenery was rather sad and worn. There was a touch here and there of the old grey and amber effect, the blue grey walls and deep yellow lamps that found their way to so many theatres in England and America. And some of the costumes were gay like the music, and historically correct; in fact, just the kind of thing one expected of the M.A.T. Other costumes looked as though they had been attending balls. They were very tired.

The remaining two plays that I saw were Gorky's "Lower Depths," and Count Alexis Tolstoy's "Tsar Feodor." The latter, together with "The Death of Ivan the Terrible" and "Tsar Boris," form an historical trilogy and a characteristic specimen of poetic tragedy of the mid-nineteenth century period. The suitability of "Feodor" to the audience of the new Russian theatre, and in particular to that extreme section of it which at an early period of the Revolution clamoured for the closing of the M.A.T. and the heads of its players on the ground that the latter were bourgeoisie and spies, lies in its powerful and probably unintentional indictment of monarchy and the exercise of absolute power in spite of unpardonable moral impotence. It draws a convincing picture of a Tsar vacillating and excessively weak. The action reveals him at the mercy of two opposing forces, powerful groups of nobles, who are trying to capture him for the attainment of their ends. He is simply tossed here and there, unable to prevent the

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destruction caused by his weakness. The play was the work of a writer strongly influenced by the classicism of Goethe and actuated by the theory of art for art's sake. He was passionately interested in ancient Russia, and particularly interested in the period formed by the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries. It was a period marked by the atrocities of Ivan the Terrible and the tragic events caused by the impotence of his son Feodor. Hence the three plays forming the said trilogy follow the order of historical events. Each play, however, is complete within itself, and "Tsar Feodor" may be followed and enjoyed without reference to the two other plays. On the shocking death of Ivan, Feodor succeeds to the throne, and Boris Godunov usurps the power of regent. Then follows a desperate struggle between two powerful parties, headed by Boris Godunov and Ivan Shouisky, for possession of the power which belongs to the Tsar, what time the Tsar remains passive.

There are seven scenes. In scene one we see Boris seated at a table reviewing the success of his political work during his seven years regency. At present this work is threatened with destruction by the intrigues of Shouisky and his party. They seek to make the Tsar divorce his wife by representing that she is sterile. Further they seek to assist the exiled Tsarvitch Dimitri to re-enter Moscow in readiness to be proclaimed Tsar when the opportune moment arrives. Boris decides to become reconciled with Shouisky. Feodor who now enters, is drawn into the plot. In scene two, in another room at the Kremlin, the action is continued with the aid of clergy and Shouisky himself, who, yielding partly to persuasion and partly to pressure, is reconciled with Boris. This is the cue for the admittance of the people headed by their representatives, who, on learning the truth, beg Shouisky not to desert them. They denounce the duplicity of Boris, and finally appeal to the Tsar to save them from him. But the Tsar closes his ears and flies, saying "I have no time. Talk to Boris." Scene three, the action of which passes in the garden of Shouisky's palace, reveals the treachery of Boris. He has caused all the people's representatives, except one, to be arrested. Shouisky, his sons and his followers discuss various plans of retaliation. Finally Shouisky goes off to the Tsar to demand the dismissal

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of Boris. In the fourth scene we are back in the Kremlin. Feodor is on the horns of a dilemma. He is asked to consent to the return of Dimitri, which he is quite ready to do. But Boris vigorously opposes this. Then comes Shouisky with the news of the arrest of the people's representatives. He denounces Boris, and demands their liberation. Feodor is disposed to grant this request also. Again he is opposed by Boris. The quarrel between Boris and Shouisky is renewed. Shouisky, ashamed of the weakness of the Tsar, goes. The action reaches a climax. A messenger arrives with a letter disclosing the plot to make Dimitri Tsar. Boris demands the arrest of Shouisky and his followers. But Feodor recalls the services that Shouisky has rendered to the State and hesitates. "Either that or I leave you with the entire responsibility of the State," says Boris. After a long and painful struggle, Feodor tells him to go. Scene five which passes in the same environment, shows Boris still at work on the destruction of Shouisky. The Tsar receives confirmation from Shouisky himself of the latter's intention to put Dimitri on the throne. In spite of this, he forgives Shouisky, who is deeply touched by this magnanimity. But no sooner has the latter left than a messenger arrives with proof of his complicity in a plot to separate the Tsar and his wife. This is too much for Feodor, who immediately orders his arrest. In the sixth scene the action, now transferred to the house of Boris, is concerned with the exposition by Boris of his own political ambitions, his determination to rid himself of Shouisky, and the fruitless intervention of the Tsarina Irina in Shouisky's behalf. The seventh and last scene is finely climatic, and lends itself to impressive staging. Feodor goes to the Cathedral to say Mass for the repose of the soul of his father, Ivan the Terrible. We see him and his entourage leaving by the great west door. The air is full of the sound of bells and the distant chanting of a hymn. News arrives that the Khan of the Tartars is invading his territory. He orders the instant release of Shouisky, who is so well able to undertake the defence of Moscow. But Shouisky has committed suicide, they inform him. Following this information comes the news that Dimitri is also dead. Feodor continues to exhibit his paralysis of will, and in the end Boris assumes complete power. He goes to meet the Tartar

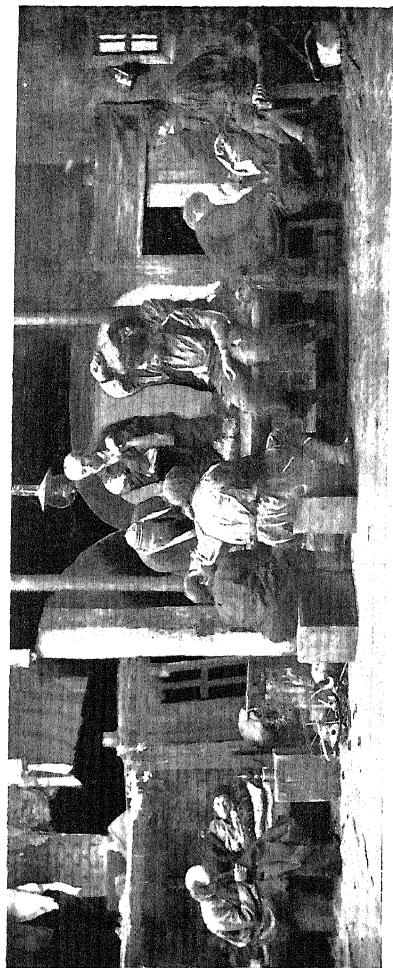
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invasion, while Feodor and the Tsarina, abandoned by all, remain alone. The wretched Feodor, full of anguish, exclaims, " Oh, my God! Why have they made me Tsar! " It reminds one of Wolsey's famous exclamation on his downfall.

This is merely an outline of the plot, but it is sufficient to show the double motive, the melodramatic struggle between Boris and Shouisky for possession of the weak-willed Tsar, and the moral impotence of the Tsar. At a moment when kingcraft is in disgrace in Russia, the indictment of a weak monarch and the exposure of intrigues by a tyrannical noble, who aspires to be Tsar, makes important communist propaganda.

More direct and as powerful is the indictment of social environment in Gorky's " Lower Depths. " The play has been performed in London, and doubtless its " plot " (if a series of formless scenes can be called a plot) is known to a good many serious playgoers. It is the formlessness, due to the complete absence of dramatic plot, that makes any attempt to describe the " action " of the play briefly, quite impossible. Throughout the four acts, characters drift in and out, and in unrelated bits of dialogue reveal the misery and despair associated with their shocking environment. The aim of the play appears to be to produce by its gloom and filthy rags an atmosphere of hopeless pessimism, relieved only by the humanity of the pilgrim, Luka, who appears to discover the presence of a God in everyone, everywhere in this mass of putrid outcasts. Luka alone weaves a thread of continuity by his simple compassion for all alike. He touches each in turn in the Night Shelter and the Waste, which form the two scenes of the play. In a way he gives a demonstration of the nature of his long wanderings, the story of which he very effectively relates to Natasha. The latter is the sister of the caretaker of the Night Shelter, and her affair with Vaska Pepel, who is a thief and has been known as the son of a thief since earliest childhood, introduces a sort of love interest, as they call matchmaking, in sentimental plays. Luka tries to promote their union in the attempt to make both happy. But Natasha has a jealous sister, Vassilissa, who intervenes at the critical moment, when Natasha has decided to be happy with Pepel, and Pepel has resolved to break with his past. Shortly after, Pepel and Vassilissa are



# THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE.

*The Lower Depths*, by Gorki.  
 actualistic detail. The scene is  
 account of its Tolstoyan ethics.

Another example of the M.A.T. unnecessary attention to unimportant  
 The play is objected to by the Russian Communists on  
 The figure seated is Luka the Pilgrim, and is said to be Tolstoy, whose  
 particular brand of Anarchism is not liked.



## STANISLAVSKY'S THEATRE

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arrested in connection with the death of the latter's husband. At last happiness flies from the Waste, where these scenes take place, and hopelessness settles down once more on these beaten human beings as the curtain descends on the third act. In the last act the tangled threads of the motiveless "plot," or the plotless "motive" (whichever it be), cross one another in hopeless confusion. Satine (the philosopher, supposed to be Gorky), holds forth on his views of life, while Natasha and the Baron, who exchange compliments and blows, together with the Tartar, Bubnoff, and the policeman, Miedviedieff, throw light on the cause of the absence of the rest of the unhappy family. "Oh, this species of folly! Let us sing," or words to that effect, are uttered by Satine as the curtain finally falls, and the spectator rises to go with a strong and bitter flavour of the Underworld in his mouth. In the representation of this play, the Moscow Art theatre may be said to have reached the pinnacle of actualism. Here again was propaganda of the communist sort, though spoilt, some communists would say by the Christian ravings of Luka.

A year later I saw these four pieces again, and in addition Tchekov's "Cherry Orchard." At this time the theatre was brighter. The auditorium was fully lighted once more, and the scenery and costumes had been touched up, while the flats were joined, thus completely concealing the bare walls of the stage. There was always a packed house. It seemed to me there were fewer house-blouses and top-boots. It looked as though the new population were throwing off the soviet livery. Still people were very plainly dressed. Most of the women's dresses had been clearly made at home out of handy inexpensive material. There was no evening dress, but I detected the sparkle of gems, and I noticed they were on the fat bosoms or fat fingers of unmistakable Jewesses. One may believe that the latter were some of the New Rich or the New Bourgeois, called forth by the New Economic Policy.

"The Cherry Orchard" was Tchekov's last play. It was produced by the Moscow Art theatre in 1904 shortly before the author died at Badenweiler in the Black Forest. Tchekov is said to be rather a journalist than a playwright, and his work has no permanent value. Whether his plays have anything to

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offer the present generation in Russia is extremely doubtful. His little farces have enjoyed a certain popularity with the workers and peasants since the Revolution, probably because they help the present assertion of the play spirit. But his long plays have been, comparatively speaking, very unpopular, and it is therefore strange that "Cherry Orchard" has remained in the M.A.T. repertory. I was told that certain changes had been made in it to suit a playgoing public, which at one time, I think in 1920, Stanislavsky declared he could not induce to enter his theatre even with his hand on the scruff of their neck. It was about this time that he found it expedient to produce "Madam Angot." Chekov said that his own cherry orchard inspired him to write his play. But I imagine that neither the nursery, nor the cherry orchard, nor the sitting room which compose the three scenes of the play, would be likely to inspire the new audience. On the other hand, there is a good deal of knockabout farce in the play, provided in particular by Charlotte, Gayer, Yasha Ephikhodof, Dunyasha and Trophimof which might please workers who are asking the circus with its acrobats, jugglers, tumblers and clowns, to provide them with a method of expressing the particular mixture of life made up of present day gravity and joy. The workers ask for a mixture of the arena and the stage; their leaders, for a mixture of the soap-box and the stage. To both cock-fights and boxing-matches are infinitely more important than stage verbal fights, because they express action, and action carried to its highest and intensest pitch. They are not concerned with mere words flowing out of men's mouths, incomprehensible to anyone except the talking machine brains that put them there. Probably then it is the clowning in the "Cherry Orchard" which has enabled the play to survive the Revolution. The wise man, Trophimof, tumbling downstairs at a very serious moment when Madam Ranevsky tells him he ought to have a mistress, is more amusing than Trophimof going through a process of self-analysis. And the comic circus air and antics of the social clowns in the third act are more important than all the introspection and dreaming supposed to relieve the soul of those who appear in, and those who witness this play.

Like Gorky's "Lower Depths," "Cherry Orchard" has



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no "plot." A number of weak-willed individuals of the old intelligentsia, landowning and merchant classes, are thrown together in a way that evokes verbal expressions of character and produces an atmosphere which suggests the peculiar social, political and economic conditions of the times, and the helplessness of a pack of degenerates to handle the problems arising from these. The "action" of the piece is concerned with the changes of social classes, the rise of one strata, as it were, and the decline of another. We see the merchant class replacing the landowning class, just as to-day the workers and peasants have replaced both. We see the impractical and impossible representatives of the land-owning class clinging to their property long after its real value and their own means have departed, and the illiterate and material representatives of the new merchant class recognising the present value of the property, and buying it in spite of the owner's tears and lamentations. In the first act the insipid Madame Ranevsky returns from Paris, where she has been leading an aimless and spendthrift life. She is met by Lopakhin, the peasant born but progress pursuing merchant. She is desperately in need of money, but does not want to sell her "Cherry Orchard" for sentimental reasons. It is associated with her childhood, her marriage, the death of her son, etc. Lopakhin, having none of these considerations to actuate him, sees that it is a "first-class building site," that the demand for villas is springing up, that there is no money in cherries and a fortune in bricks and mortar. These two, the will-less but generous fragment of the noblesse and the no-less generous but up-to-date money-bag whose name suggests "spade," dominate the scenes. Round them move a number of comparatively impotent creatures, harping on the main theme, the absence and possession of money. In the end, Lopakhin buys the property, and the former owner quits it, leaving the representative of the new society in possession.

I have given five examples of pieces which afford a very good illustration of the change effected in the programme of the Right theatre by the communist mood operating upon it. With the exception of "Cherry Orchard," each contributes something to the communist mood, ridicule of impotence and snobbery, hatred of tyrants and rulers, disgust at murderous

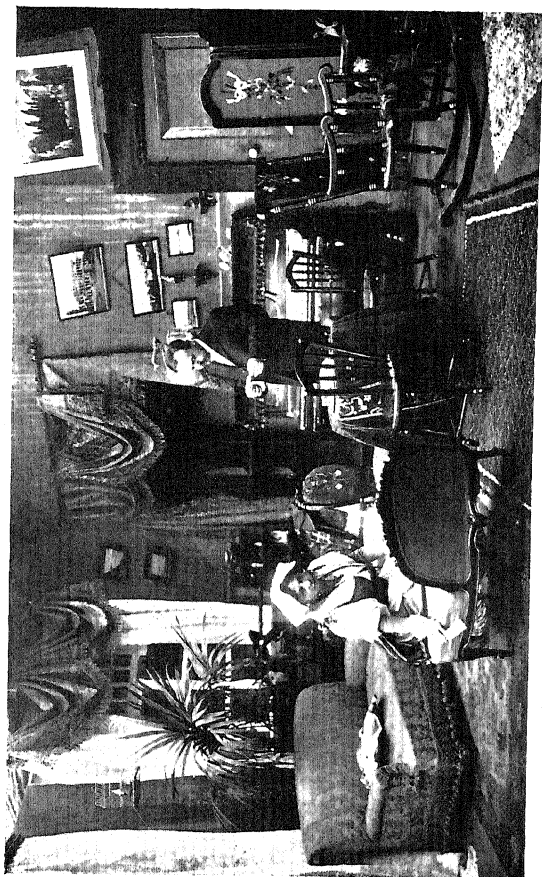
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social conditions, and so on. The picture of a death-centred-society presented by "Cherry Orchard," probably has very little to give a life-centred one such as we find in Russia to-day. Perhaps it stirs the emotions of repugnance and derision, sets up a feeling of contempt for the "society wasters" exhibited, and produces an outburst of laughter at their silly folly. And may be in so doing it strengthens the conception by the spectators of a better state than their own. In any case, if this play does make an appeal to a somewhat primitive and life-actuated audience, it must be by the expression of primary instincts and emotions contrasting with or akin to their own.

I have not gone into the details of the acting and staging of these pieces. Both preserved the traditions of the theatre and fully illustrated the methods of actualism upon which it rests its fame. There is nothing new to be said about them.

In concluding this chapter I might ask, What precisely is the Moscow Art theatre's place in the new theatrical sun? What position does it occupy in the unified scheme of the new theatre? The answer is that to-day it forms a museum of historical concept, organisation and applied principles. It exhibits details which the Centre and the Left theatres are imitating and developing. The Centre theatre forms the continuing and popularising machinery. It continues some of the Right theatre traditions, and it popularises some of the Left theatre ideas. The Left theatre is the laboratory where the extreme radical ideas are produced and tested before being taken up by the Centre theatre, and the Studios which harbour the insurgent youth of the Right theatre.



THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE.

*A Doll's House*, by Ibsen. A play that has not been seen since the Revolution. Another example of photographic actualism that out-Belasco Belasco. The new worker audience have no use for this anarchistic individualism and its stuffy surroundings.



## CHAPTER XIX

### *THE RIGHT GROUP (Continued)*

#### (ii) THE STUDIO THEATRES

**B**ELONGING to the Moscow Art theatre, State theatres and Workers' theatre are Studio theatres. This form of school of acting is said to have originated with Stanislavsky soon after the war began. Since the Revolution he has organised nine Studios, including the Jewish theatre Studio and the Opera Studio. The Studio theatre is an offshoot or development of the theatre academy or school of acting which exists particularly in countries with State endowed theatres. Actually, the Studio theatre is a theatre academy designed to train young players and to prepare them for the larger stage, usually the parent stage, possessing one or more Studio theatres. It is also an academy theatre since the players are trained in view of the audience, so to speak, who are admitted in the same way that they gain admittance to the parent theatre. It may reasonably be compared with the Little theatres of America, which are largely a training ground for co-operative and other groups and cliques containing a number of raw recruits.

Probably Stanislavsky conceived of the Studio theatre as a training theatre with a building and a repertory of its own and as a theatre academy capable of paying its own way. Another object was to supply its parent theatre with actors. Thus while it was meant to serve the function of a school, it also served that of a working theatre, not only affording instruction to pupils in the art and craft work of the theatre, but enabling them, through public performances, to gain confidence in themselves, breadth of manner, and the general assurance necessary to fit them to take an important part on the parent stage at a moment's

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notice. So we may say the Russian Studio theatre is both educational and economic. The Studio system has discovered a good deal of new talent. Studio theatre performances of plays are sometimes better than the parent theatre performances. The company playing at the Moscow Art theatre, while Stanislavsky and the principal company are away from home, are recruited from the Studios. In my opinion, their work is better in many respects than that of the parent company.

I do not know whether Moscow was originally designed architecturally to form innumerable little theatres, studio, cellar, first floor, and the rest. But the fact remains that a very great number of companies have established themselves in theatres formed by spacious and, in many cases, elegant flats and rooms belonging to private mansions, and preserving all the best characteristics of domestic architecture. Others have found accommodation in clubs, disused offices, etc. As we have seen in previous chapters, important Workers' theatres, and two at least of the Academic theatres, have been fashioned, as it were, out of mansions of the rich.

The theatre of the First Studio consists of a large grey chamber with some ante-rooms. It is oblong in shape, has no galleries, and contains accommodation for about 150 spectators. Originally this theatre had no conventional stage, or curtain or footlights. To-day the convention of mixing the actors with the spectators is continued. In the two last pieces that I saw, the actors kept to the ordinary stage. But in some Shakespearean performances that I remember seeing, they frolicked all over the place, even using the cloak-room and lobby as extensions of the stage. Sometimes they chased each other in the stalls and circles, sat beside the spectators and saturated them with the odour of grease paint, made trips to the upper part of the building, whence they threw their voices to the stage across the astonished but delighted audience. On one occasion two of the principals, I think Sir Toby and Sir Andrew Ague-Cheek, went outside the theatre and engaged in an argument that came floating through the open window. As it was impossible to instal heavy machinery or mechanical devices like a revolving stage, a simpler method of doing away with act and scene intervals and other modern unnecessary interruptions to the action of Shakespeare's plays had to be

## THE STUDIO THEATRES

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devised. It took the form of sliding curtains slightly different from the screens described elsewhere. The difference consisted in the curtains being attached by rings to iron rods fixed to the ceiling. They were arranged in such a way that a part could be drawn back at a time, thus revealing a scene composed of a segment of a full scene, just as a corner of a room with a chair and table might be left exposed by masking the rest of the room and furniture with a curtain. But this kind of technique, which has grown out of the use of the neo-Shakespearean stage introduced by Mr. William Poel, is fairly well-known by this time.

To imaginative and romantic souls, no doubt, these fairly primitive surroundings present the picture of an enchanted castle where the slaying of incompetence proceeds at a great speed. To matter-of-fact persons they may appear a veritable hotbed of insurgent youth. Although the pupils are expected to defend the traditions of the academic parent theatre, they are not forbidden to introduce innovations of their own. The training and productions are carried on under the personal supervision of the head of the parent theatre. He is assisted by a staff of instructors, some of whom lead the young pupils to new ideas coming from, say, the Left theatre whose performances the instructors are in the habit of attending. Such ideas come out mainly in the scenery used by the Studios. As far as I have seen, the interpretation is unchanged. The system of actualistic acting introduced and developed by Stanislavsky is applied by the Studios, and is quite untouched by the new influences. Hence has arisen a strong contradiction between the acting and the staging. While there is only one method of acting, there are several methods of staging.

The Moscow Art theatre has four Studios. Apparently they form a graduated system of instruction and experiment. They range from the Fourth Studio to the First, from school-theatres for eager children scarcely in their teens to those for mature players ready to appear at the parent theatre.

As in organisation, so in methods the M.A.T. Studios follow each other. These methods may be illustrated by some performances which I witnessed at the First Studio theatre and at the Moscow Art theatre by the First Studio company. I went to these performances for the purpose of seeing whether the

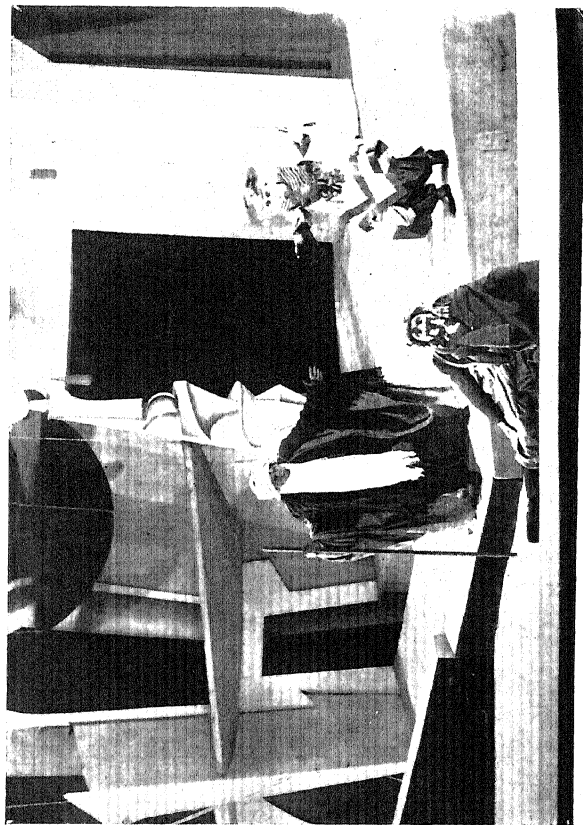
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work of the M.A.T. Studios were contributing towards the construction of the new Russian theatre and the world which it expresses. I was curious to find out whether the youth of the academic theatre were thriving on the emotional, anti-communist matter upon which the M.A.T. rested in its early days, or whether they, too, were bursting with the importance of the social change and were doing something to reflect the new life and struggles of the people.

The first piece I saw at the First Studio theatre was "The Flood," an adaptation of an American play. I think it was about ten years old, and was written to suit the pre-war mood of the American public. At the same time it contained matter capable of communistic interpretation. The action takes place in a small town in Canada. There is a river with a dam. This dam is the underlying motive, just as the swamp in Ibsen's "An Enemy of Society" is. The one scene is a expressionistic-realistic reproduction of an American bar. The weather is very dry and hot. A heated discussion arises between two characters, one a wealthy corn speculator, the other the chairman of the society that built the dam. Will the drought be followed by a deluge? And if so, will the dam hold? The Jew corn-dealer says it will not, and openly accuses the chairman of building a defective dam. There is a fierce row. A sudden deluge. People rush on with the news that the river is rising. Everyone exhibits great terror. The chairman tries to calm them by saying the dam will hold. But the dam bursts. Curtain to first act. In Act 2 the same scene forms a sort of Ark. It is night, the blind is drawn. The characters are imprisoned. The water is rising inch by inch. They believe they are going to die. This effects a great change in them. They stop quarrelling and become close friends. There are mutual confessions. The chairman admits that his society built the dam defectively for dividends and profit. A young man and woman, who have just met after a long separation, renew their love in spite of the woman's confession that she is a prostitute. The miserly bar-tender distributes his champagne freely. All drink, sing, dance, and make merry. The water rises rapidly. As it does so, each convenience and means of communication is cut off. First the telephone stops, being nearest the ground, then the telegraph, and then the electric





THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE FIRST STUDIO.

*Turandot*, as produced by the M.A.T. First Studio. The style of the scene represents an insurgent movement towards the Left by the students of the M.A.T. They have broken away from the actualism of the parent theatre and are moving towards the theatre of Revolution by way of the Kamerny Theatre.



## THE STUDIO THEATRES

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light goes out. All sit waiting for the end. The scene is lit by a candle. Curtain. Act 3 opens in darkness. The characters are asleep. One awakes and discovers the water is falling. All wake. There is a sudden change of feeling. The old characteristics and antagonisms return. Quarrels are renewed. The man repudiates the prostitute. The chairman repudiates his promise of reform. The bar-tender produces a heavy bill for champagne. The electric light, telegraph and telephone are restored. The scene gradually returns to the condition on which the curtain first rose. The sun bursts in. All leave except the chairman, who says he is ruined. Here we have a potential murderer and veritable robber indifferent to human interests, punished in a melodramatic way.

The performance of "Eric XIV" of Sweden, also at this theatre, revealed the Left theatre influences at work in the scenery and make-up. "Eric" was first produced about two years ago, and is of a more revolutionary character than "The Flood." It is a costume play, set in early Swedish times, and deals with the antics of a mad king and his alternating moods of good and bad. Eric has a vicious brother who wants the throne, and stirs up a revolution in order to get it. In the end Eric, finding himself between assassination and suicide, chooses the latter, and red-beard, his brother, succeeds him. Communistically speaking, the piece is an attack on a mad king holding absolute power. The part of the demented king affords an opportunity for powerful acting. The scenery showed traces of "space-construction," volumes being used instead of painted surfaces. And the make-up followed the futuristic plastic method in use at the Gabima theatre. The actors' faces were built-up mask-like. Eric had a very livid and wild expression. He was dressed entirely in white. I did not like the curious mixture. The scenery was one thing, the make-up another, the acting another. The first was dynamic, the second static, the third academic and actualistic.

I think the performance of Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew," by the First Studio company at the Moscow Art theatre, pleased me most. It was a mixture of the old and the new, but in the matter of scenery it was a more distinct break-away from tradition than "Eric XIV." It illustrated the

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principle of applying a revolutionary background to an unrevolutionary play, that is, a play having no characters endowed with the communist mentality, or acting in a manner that could bear a communistic meaning, unless the queer behaviour of the two principal bourgeois characters, Katherine and Petrucchio, may be said to do so.

The staging, which was very effective, followed the neo-Shakespearean convention introduced by Mr. William Poel to England some years ago, and which has since been copied all over the world, and the tradition in the making set up by the Left theatre, where the ideas of construction and the circus are seeking to earn an epoch-making fame. The main advantage sought and gained were those of the form and working of the Shakespearean stage, namely, continuous action and rapid change of scene. The arrangement of the one setting fully illustrated the difference between composition and construction, that is, the difference between the old or æsthetic school of stage decoration, with its emphasis on ornament, decoration, prettiness and diffusion; and the new or mathematical school of space construction with its emphasis on essentiality, logic and concentration. At first glance the setting looked like an arrangement of white geometrical models used at a drawing school. At the second glance the models appeared like circus forms thrown in a confused heap. Down stage right was a tall cone, and against this a curved staircase leading to a platform at the top of the cone, and another cone springing from it. At the centre of the stage was another curved staircase, designed to bring the players on and take them off. In front of the staircases there were some platforms. At the left of the stage were a number of volumes of different heights, with platform-like tops forming different levels. In the centre of these a doorway. The back of the stage was hung with dark green and purple curtains that, besides giving value to the white masses, produced an impression of immensity. This scene was worked with four moveable coloured screens—peacock blue, orange, magenta, and canary yellow—which revolved or swung to the left or right on pivots, and resembled nothing so much as large silken fire screens. They were a variation of the screens which I had seen used in a performance of "Twelfth Night" at an earlier date. All the scenes were got

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and all the changes necessary were made by the use of these screens. It would take too long to describe the working of the screens scene by scene. But here are a few of the scenes. Act 2—Scene 1 was got by placing the four screens left, leaving the stage, staircases and volumes to the right open. 2—The four screens were moved centre, masking the staircases and volumes, and forming a space for a scene between Katherine and Petrucchio. Exit and entrances were made left and right. 3—One screen was removed, the three remaining were brought together, leaving the staircases centre exposed for entrances and exits. 4—The screens were turned slantwise, exposing other exits. 5—The screens were arranged on either side of the stage, masking some of the volumes, and leaving the centre open for an important entrance by Katherine and Petrucchio. The third act was divided into two scenes. There was the well-known supper scene, in which Petrucchio succeeds in forcing Katherine into subjection. This was played with Japanese-like simplicity. There was none of the ludicrous feeding effects such as usually marks the handling of this scene in England, where food in the form of pantomime properties is used by Petrucchio to tantalise Katherine. At the Moscow Art theatre the scene was played by moving the screens centre and placing a platform in front of them. The business consisted mostly of suggestion. Then there was the final Banquet scene. Here again there was no food. Indeed, the only feast provided was that of colour. At the conclusion the twenty gay and fantastically-dressed figures took their departure through the auditorium. The Tinker's scenes, to which some advanced producers attach much importance, were very simply and effectively done. They were played in front of a pink and purple curtain containing a big geometrical design. To the right and left white circus-looking ladders provided exits and entrances for the characters in the prologue. In the centre a white, also circus-looking, barrel made a pedestal upon which the Tinker delivered himself of the quaint introduction to the play. This setting reappeared at the conclusion of the play. The Tinker was brought on asleep and laid with his head on the lowest rung of the white ladder right. I think this way of handling the Tinker's scenes is better than the one followed by Sir John Martin Harvey at the Prince of Wales

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Theatre, where he gave our bibulous friend the conductor's seat in the sawpit.

A good deal could be said about the colour which the whole setting was designed to take. It was very brilliant, and served very nicely to emphasise the conception of the spirit of the play as a frolic. It was a little hard to understand why both Katherine and Petrucchio wore black and orange. The crowds and the revellers exhibited a wide range of pure colours, and made very striking effects every time they were distributed about the setting at different levels, according to the method now in vogue in the new theatre. As to the acting, the "taming" was rather a psychological than a physical process. There was none of the whip lashing which characterises Mr. Oscar Asche's way of talking to Katherine. Miss Karnakova, the Russian Katherine, had a petit figure, and Mr. Gotovtsev, the Petrucchio, was slightly built also. The former had to overact to express her shrewishness. The latter endeavoured to impose his will upon her by refusing to allow her to have her way in any particular.

The application of the ideas of the extreme Left by the Studio theatre youth had the effect of making the M.A.T. look very old-fashioned. I could not help concluding that the child was very much in advance of its parent. And if the parent could but follow in the footsteps of its child, it would surely bring the former renewed fame, if not fortune, in these penniless times.

The Workers' theatre also has its Studios. The following description of their organisation and work is taken from an official publication.<sup>1</sup>

The Gorky studio theatre in Moscow is a product of the wave of dramatic enthusiasm that passed over the Russian working masses during the Revolution. The theatre, always the property of the Russian intelligentsia, suddenly became national property, and, in very fact, a folk possession. The early system of ticket distribution through the trade unions, most of the tickets being free, transformed the audiences into wholly working-class ones, who were carried away by the sudden revelation of this rare and perfect treasure—as Russian dramatic art has always been. This was one of the healthy

<sup>1</sup> "Russian Information and Review."

## THE STUDIO THEATRES

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things the Revolution took over from the tsarist regime, and it knew how to appreciate it.

The Soviet Government encouraged this enthusiasm for the theatre as part of its campaign of enlightenment of the masses. Dramatic societies sprang up in every corner of Russia and received official help. Every one of the numerous workers' clubs that also came into existence at this period was either a school of drama or a dramatic critics' club.

The Gorky Studio theatre is stamped with the impression of the enthusiastic proletariat. It came into existence in 1918, and originated in a series of lectures on drama at the Workers' Club, of the Central Workers' Co-operative Society. It later transformed itself into the Gorky Studio, and finally, in 1920, became the Gorky Studio theatre, and installed itself in its bijou quarters in the Tverskoy.

The whole staff of the theatre are working men and women—there is not a single professional actor among them. They are mostly printers, Red Army soldiers, clerks, and shop assistants. More than half of them have received no more than elementary education, and none anything above secondary education. Since its transformation, many of the members have been transferred from their ordinary work to devote themselves entirely to the stage. The rest continue as before. Every stage of the work of producing is done in the theatre itself.

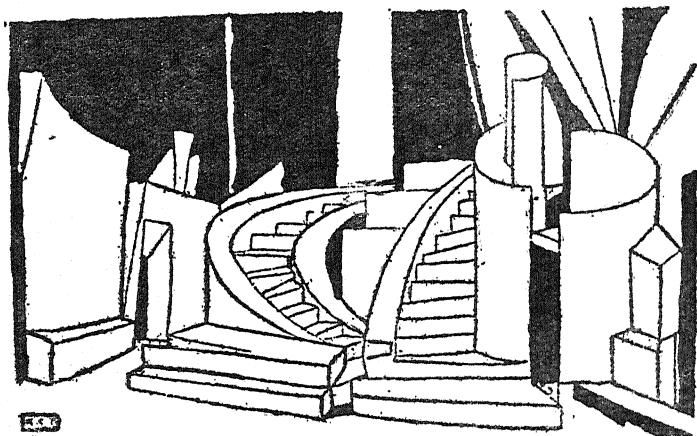
The first effort of the studio was the dramatisation of certain of the more striking tales of Gorky, among them "The Passions Enchained," one of his most recent works. The production was witnessed and approved of by Gorky himself, and was so enthusiastically received that Lunacharsky, the Commissary of Education, sent a company to play in the workers' theatres of Saratov, and afterwards to tour the Saratov province. There the studio also staged Ostrovsky's "Bolzaminov's Marriage."

Returning to Moscow, the studio enlarged its repertory with many new and old pieces, among them "Malva," by Gorky. The staging of "Malva" was one of the studio's triumphs. It is based on a story of Gorky's, and deals with a theme which the author frequently treats of—the life and psychology of the peasant as embodying the life and psychology of Russia itself. The Studio theatre managed to throw a special interest into

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their production by emphasising an aspect which is at present the subject of keen interest in Russia—the relations between the village and the town. "Malva" is a favourite with the Moscow theatre-goers, and is frequently performed in other theatres.

The Gorky Studio theatre naturally does not confine itself to staging Gorky. Among its repertory this season are Tchekov's "The Man in Number 31," Molière's "Georges Dandin," Maupassant's "Devil," several plays of Shakespeare, and others.



MOSCOW ART THEATRE FIRST STUDIO. *The Taming of the Shrew*.  
Setting showing the influence of the Left Theatre.



## CHAPTER XX

### *THE RIGHT GROUP (Continued)*

#### (iii) THE POST-N.E.P. THEATRES

THIS group belonging to the Right Group is constituted by a number of places of entertainment affected by the New Economic Policy introduced by the Soviet Government in 1921. Under this policy it was possible for theatres to re-open under private management, and for others to change their programmes to suit the taste of a new middle class composed of shopkeepers and other traders with no political or social status.

These "new" theatres, though conceived of as commercial enterprises, are sufficiently controlled by the Soviet Government to make profit-making and reactionary exhibitions impossible. That is, a strict control is kept over them and their forms of amusements. The effect is to lead certain established theatres, those of the Ermitage group, the Korsh theatre, etc., towards a more distinctly form of bourgeois play. At one time they were disposed to take their cue from the Left and Centre (State) Groups. To-day they take it from the extreme Right. The Korsh, however, continues its policy of producing international masterpieces.

The Korsh theatre was established in 1882 as the Russian Dramatic theatre. It opened with a distinguished programme, its first performance being that of Gogol's "Revisor." It became one of the theatres frequented by the intelligentsia, and at one time enjoyed a considerable reputation for advance, largely on account of the activities and ideas of its director, F. A. Korsh. For some months after the Revolution, like other outstanding theatres, the Moscow Art theatre, the theatre

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of Operetta, and the Nezlobina theatre, it stuck to its policy. It continued to play the old international programme. But early in 1919 it began to receive warnings, which led its director to put on plays more suited to the public mood. Among them were Shelly's "Cenci" and Romain Rolland's "Danton," two pieces which have found much favour with revolutionary audiences. Subsequently it passed through the various difficulties imposed on theatres by the political and economic conditions, and eventually experienced the leniency that accompanied the change of Soviet policy. I was not much impressed by the effect of the latter on its programme when I visited the Korsh a year or two ago. The very attractive theatre was badly in need of renovation; both the exterior and interior were falling to pieces. The same might be said of its new species of exhibition. I went hoping to see a sample of its renowned international goods. But all I saw was a silly musical play, staged in a manner that nearly gave me heart disease. The wretched properties consisted of a black wooden frame representing a grand piano, makeshift chairs and tables, and dirty fit-up scenery too small for the Korsh stage. Since then the theatre has recovered a little. To-day it has a classical and modern repertory, and the names of Moliere, Schiller, Goldini, Ostrovsky adorn its programme, and give it a quasi-revolutionary air. But I am afraid the improvement is part of an attempt to come into line with the theatres which are catering for the Nepmen under the watchful eye of the Commissariat for Art and Education. At any rate, Lunacharsky speaks approvingly of its work.

The Ermitage Group consists of a block of entertainment buildings and adjoining pleasure gardens, containing cafes, open-air theatres, concert stage, shooting galleries, and all the machinery for light and popular amusement. It had a far less ambitious beginning and career than the Korsh.

As a result of the Government policy of the propagation of communism by means of popular and easily understood theatrical exhibitions in which Moscow's very best players, singers and dancers took part, the Ermitage theatres were drawn into the revolutionary current. The entertainment buildings and pleasure gardens went into the service of propaganda to such an extent that it was as if London's West End

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theatres had wandered into Trafalgar Square and got mixed up with a Bolshevik demonstration. The grounds burst into blocks of industrial information, the walls covered themselves with a competitive assortment of theatre bills and statistical information, and the auditoriums arrayed themselves in flaming streamers which lifted up their voices and exhorted the multitude to work and create, to produce and to grow fat (in the Marxian way).

I think these popular houses took the business of flaunting the choicest products of communist wisdom badly. When I visited them in 1921 they were still all making their bread in the Bolshevik way, and they appeared to be considerably depressed about it. I was struck in particular by the desperate state of one of the theatres—I forget whether it was the Moscow Dramatic theatre or the principal Ermitage theatre. At all events, they are close together. The auditorium was dark, grimy, and mildewy in places. There was a large hole in the ceiling partly boarded up. The great chandeliers had two or three jets burning, which threw a ghostly shadow over everything. The seats were mostly old chairs, fastened together, and repaired with string. The spectators found their own way to their places where they sat with hats and overcoats on, trying to read the red newspapers in semi-darkness. There was no orchestra. I remember, too, arriving one dismal night at the Zemnie theatre. The revolutionary piece about events in Petrograd on March 9th to 12th, 1801, was billed to commence at nine. The doors opened at 9.20. At 9.30 the audience began to knock loudly for the curtain to rise. After twenty minutes of warming our hands and feet in this manner, the performance began. First came an act in which a deboshed Robespierre let himself go in a thoroughly convincing manner. He stormed about the stage, bullied officers in Imperial uniforms, clipped the wig of one, tore it off, danced a hornpipe on it, and then sent the unhappy owner to be shot. Shortly after, the owner reappeared on a stretcher minus his wig and the top of his skull. What struck me most about this historical blood and thunder piece was that the action took place in the midst of winter. The snow was about ten feet deep. But no one on the stage wore overcoats. As for Robespierre, he simply

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hopped about like a sparrow to keep himself warm. The one thing I liked was the property brazier, which stood in the open square. I found the sight of it very warm and comforting whenever I had a fit of the shivers. There was a long interval, during which we all went for a constitutional in the grounds. After the interval, Robespierre let off some more fireworks and danced on the aristocratic officers in turn. Another long interval and another constitutional. It was now 11.30 and snowing hard. So I went home to dream about the conclusion of this revolutionary satire on the old regime. I saw a performance at the Dramatic theatre which was much on the same line. It was a revolutionary satire on the middle nineteenth century Russian society. It held the old bourgeoisie up to the contempt of the new working-class audience. There were some very excellent character sketches. Indeed the acting in all these depressing plays was of a first-class order. The Soviet Government spared no pains to put the highest talent at the service of the workers. But the scenery and properties were sometimes too shocking for words. In the present instance the scene was set outside a restaurant. There were four damaged and dirty tables containing nothing but a pot of soiled water, supposed to be tea which went the round of several thirsty souls. An old backcloth with a daub of blue represented architecture and sky. Left and right were odds and ends of wings indulging in a drunken frolic. To complete these futurist effects there was a wooden lamp-post with a farthing dip which shed greasy tears over everyone, as though doing penance for the sins of the scenery.

As I mentioned elsewhere, the Ermitage Group has recently fallen on better days. It has cleaned itself, purged itself of communist propaganda cumber, and has started to make its bread in the old way, with the exception that it is obliged to use a leaven of Soviet Government censorship. From what I saw of its programme a few months ago, its proprietor has no intention of tickling the ears of the groundlings with high-brow stuff, or of tiring the working-class ear by a querulous appeal to a passing revolutionary mood. He would doubtless like to make his property as profitable as possible—but there are communist objections to this. So he merely follows the example of capitalists at a distance, and he solicits public support by a programme

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some of the items of which make the serious-minded almost demented. I saw the beginning of an American musical play. I saw only the beginning—and then I fled. The kind of entertainment reminded me too much of the dear Homeland.

The N.E.P. then has caused a split in the new Russian theatre, and is encouraging the renewal of some undesirable post-revolution features. On the one hand, certain old-established theatres of the extreme Right are casting hopeful eyes on the long train of modifications and variations set up by the Government's N.E.P. Besides the established theatres a number of little bourgeois theatres have sprung up, including chamber, cafe, and restaurant theatres of the "Bat" species, but without the Bat quality. This orgy of bourgeoisism has its significance for the die-hards of the revolutionary party.

On the other hand, the radical theatres have gone with the revolution current. But their supporters recognise that the new policy of the Government was bound to call for a reaction on the part of limpets on the traditional forms of drama. They recognise, too, that the fairly strict control kept over the revived places of amusement by the Government prevents them slipping to the low level of their commercial counterparts in Western Europe and America. While this control continues to prevent academic theatres, like the Moscow Art theatre, and their understudies, from returning to pre-war commercial bourgeoisism, the extremists think they are justified in hoping that the Revolutionary theatre of Russia will prevail in the long run, and the offensive product of the N.E.P. will disappear with the policy itself.

## CHAPTER XXI

### *THE CINEMA.—ITS FOUR DIVISIONS*

#### (i) THE GOS-KINO

**I**N the foregoing chapters it has been shown how the Russian workers discovered the theatre and reshaped it for their own use, and what they want of it. They have also discovered the cinema and propose to put it to much greater use than any other country is doing. They conceive of it much as they do of the theatre. It is an instrument for the expression of their whole life and every side of it; of their whole country, its reconstruction, its present and future. Beyond this they want it to express the life of the working-class throughout the world. They want the workers of each country to have their own cinemas, to make their own films, and to set up a mutual exchange. So nationalisation and internationalisation of the cinema is their present dream of the Russian workers.

The new Russian cinema is exceedingly interesting just now—as interesting in a way as the theatre. Like the theatre, it cannot be understood without a reference to the sociological situation. Its origin, growth and development are, in fact, bound up with political, social, economic, and industrial development.

Directly after the Revolution the cinema was denationalised and put at the service of communism and the working-class population. In 1921, owing to economic pressure, a change took place, and the Government permitted a revival of private management of the picture palaces. This had the effect of separating cinema activities into four divisions. To-day there are the Gos-kino, or Government cinema; the Proletcult-Kino, or cinema of Proletarian culture; the Revolutionary kino, or

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cinema of political and Revolutionary satire; and the new Bourgeois-kino, or, as we would say in England, the Commercial cinema. Each of these, its conception, aims, organisation, actuality and possibility, deserve to be considered in turn. Together they form a new and unified cinema world, just as all parts of the theatre fall together in a new unified theatrical world.

The Gos-Kino has a social meaning and aim similar to those of the State or Centre Group theatre. It stands for education, propaganda and agitation, and is organised accordingly.

It also has a commercial aim of some importance. Its aims may be said to be three. 1—Rebuilding of home cinema industry. 2—Revival of foreign trade. 3—To influence foreign capital. This necessitates (a) Meeting the requirements of Soviet Russia, namely, propaganda, agitation, and education. (b) Meeting the requirements of the foreign market, namely, the production and export of films suited to that market and the import of films purchased in that market. So we get (a) the need of the production of films and apparatus to satisfy home demands, (b) production of films and apparatus to suit foreign markets, (c) importation of films and apparatus for home consumption. The first of these activities belongs to the Proletcult kino organisation, which might be said to be the watchdog of home cinema, political and social interests. Of course, its main business is to look after the worker's culture, and to see that he does not get corrupted by reactionary material and means, such as the capitalistic films. The second is almost negligible. Russia has very little either in films or apparatus to export. Its activities in this direction will be indicated in the different sections of this chapter. The third is restricted by lack of capital and the requirements of the new Soviet State and the new population. As will be shown presently, imports have to go under close scrutiny, and they are carefully selected on political grounds, and adapted, if necessary, to political purposes.

The Gos-kino has two centres of organisation, one in Moscow and one in Petrograd. Each has a very inclusive nature. Each is a centralising institution controlling and directing all the cinema activities in the city to which it belongs. Together they control all the Russian cinema industry. I am well acquainted

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with both. I will describe the Petrograd organisation, which is practically similar to the Moscow one.

But first let me mention a conversation I had with Liebermann, the new director of the All-Russia Photo Kino Department, as the Moscow organisation is called. It was about a year ago. We were discussing the possibilities of film trade revival in Russia, and he told me some facts concerning the proposed reorganisation of his department, in view of such a possibility. I had just told him I gathered from what I could see of the film business in Moscow that it was with the Government foreign firms would have to deal. Although the Government had given permission to private persons to manage cinemas, they had not gone out of the business, but strictly controlled all sides of it. He said it was true, and the A.R.P.K. was the Government Department organised to control it. He added that there was a proposal to reorganise this department, which had been very active in producing and distributing propaganda and educational matter. All cinema activities were to be concentrated in one cinema industry centre, and an attempt made to attract capital, both Russian and foreign for exploiting cinemas. I inquired into the difference between the system of 1919-21 and that of 1923, and was told that the main difference was this bid for Russian and foreign capital for the purpose of extending the cinema trade. As to control of private enterprise, the Government through its special department directed and controlled the production by private firms from a political and artistic standpoint, and admitted nothing of a counter-revolutionary character. The work of editing and censorship was carried out by the A.R.P.K. In the matter of subject the Government adhered to its former policy of exhibiting films, historical, topical, etc., that promote the communist life. The old kino pictures which it permitted to be exploited must all be a means to this end. The manufacture of films was carried on at State laboratories and producing centres at Moscow, Jalta, Odessa, Petrograd, Charkoff, Kiev, and places necessary for local colour. It seems that two private firms were associated with the A.R.P.K. department under an agreement, by which they are permitted to rent theatres, exhibit films where they like, but their pictures and activities were strictly under control.



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Thus I discovered that an active Russian kinema industry existed. But everything concerning it was concentrated in the A.R.P.K. At that moment a great deal of attention was being paid to the production of pictures of topical interest, such as the trial of the socialists in Moscow, of which I saw a great number of photos exhibited in the streets.

I went into the question of import and export. Nothing, however, was decided. Nothing can be decided until an agreement has been concluded between the A.R.P.K. and foreign film firms. In short, Soviet Russia will continue to make its own films suitable for illustrating the Government policy. But revival of film trade with foreign countries can only be attained by means of the said agreement between the All-Russia Photo Kino Department and foreign enterprises.

More recently I was shown over Petrograd's All-Russia Photo Kino Department and organisation, situated in Nevski Prospect (now rechristened 'Twenty-fifth October'). The tour of inspection was personally conducted by the director, A. M. Slibkin, who was very courteous and was anxious to shew me all sides of this somewhat unique affair. I found the whole thing very instructive. I saw how the Petrograd cinema industry works as a whole. Moreover, how it is controlled from one centre, just as London's crime is looked after by Scotland Yard. Indeed, in most respects the Petrograd organisation resembles a cinema Scotland Yard. It is here that all alien films have to report themselves, and to pass in succession through a number of rooms where they are examined, checked, censored, retitled, and finally handed to the different cinemas to which they have been allotted by the selection committee. Nothing is shown at any cinema that has not first passed through this mill. The Scotland Yard characteristics are present from the beginning. Before I was allowed to see anything or receive any information I was requested to show all my papers. It was not sufficient that I was an English journalist inquiring into the condition of the Russian cinema; I had to satisfy the director that I was a person to be trusted, and one not likely to betray trade secrets, so to speak. I was a little flabbergasted by this fuss, and am still, for I do not remember seeing any trade secrets that were worth betraying.

I saw a great deal that was worth seeing, and this was con-

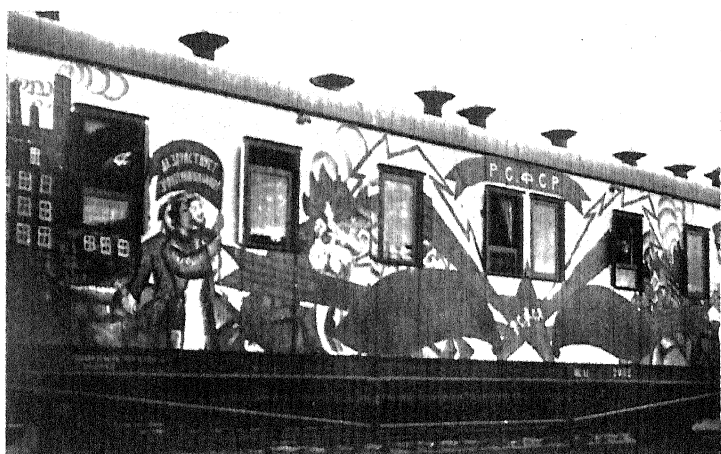
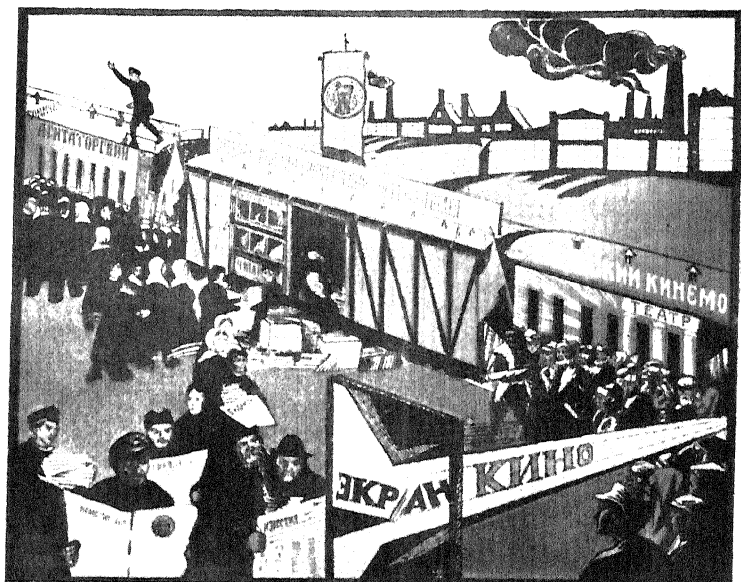
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tained in a large number of rooms, through which I was taken, and which formed administrative, storing, distributing, and other offices. The fireproof store rooms, padded with asbestos, and containing piles and piles of recently imported films, interested me. So did a little room fitted with a telephone apparatus which communicated with every branch and with the whole of the Petrograd kino industry. This in itself was a proof of the thoroughness of the Government organisation for the control and direction of the cinemas. Another Scotland Yard room was the police room, where all the good and bad records of the films were kept and the behaviour of the cinemas continually watched. The voyage through the ticket office, where the tickets for all the cinemas were issued every day, the cashier's office, the censor's office, and various other controlling offices, then through the committee rooms, including one used by the Clerks' Soviet—a body elected by the employees to control the administration; and thus through the advisory committee rooms, used by scientific experts, some of them professors of high degree, who have volunteered to advise the administration in the choice and use of scientific films—this revealed the threads of a very complicated piece of co-operation.

From the offices we made our way to the apparatus shop, where, however, nothing exciting happened. There was a large stock of Russian projectors, some fairly recent ones. I was told that there was a shortage of films, as none were being made in Russia. Adjoining the administrative offices was the Parisiana, a Gos-kino cinema. This is specially used by the photo-kino department. I was shewn a large room next to the Parisiana which is being prepared as an exhibition room, to which the Parisianas may adjourn when they want a change from the screen. The walls will be hung with samples of the best cinema pictures, mostly in colour to match the rather elaborate scale of decoration. This project contains a suggestion which might be acted upon by cinemas outside Russia. An audience would doubtless appreciate an exhibition of the artistic material and means of the cinema. A permanent exhibition of good photography would doubtless promote an increased public interest in good pictures.

Concerning imports and exports, I was told much the same



### THE ALL-RUSSIA CINEMA.

Above: A propaganda and agitational train provided with cinema, theatre, printing-press, library, etc., for visiting remote rural districts. Reproduced from a poster. Below: Another propaganda train decorated with colour, form and inscription: that tell the peasants how to prepare themselves for the new Soviet life. The inscription shown is "Long Life to the 3rd or Communist International."



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as at Moscow. Russia would like to export revolutionary films, but the English Government does not want them. My informant spoke as though he thought England was rather slow in this respect. He mentioned with pride the daring action of Sweden, which, it seems, has ordered several miles of "The Comedian" film. This film was being shown at the Parisiana for the first time. Looking at it from all sides, I was quite unable to understand what particular use Sweden could make of it. The Russian Government has made it for a Russian audience. It is a Russian political propaganda film, showing the struggle between the Russian serf of 100 years ago and his master. In the end the latter is overcome and the serf is triumphant. The picture has all the well-known characteristics of this kind of subject. Brutal military rulers supported by equally brutal Cossacks, go the pace in abducting and ravishing women and murdering or knouting all who come in their way. Sensation is provided in large doses, especially at the end, where some serfs are stirred up to set fire to the ogre's castle.

All this was doubtless good stuff for the Russians. But I failed to see how it could interest foreign audiences. True, the scenes of life and character were well done, and the acting was simple, unaffected and natural. But the photography and lighting were bad, and very little attempt was made at artistic arrangement. Doubtless the film attained its object, as shown by the title, of holding the old ruling class up to ridicule. I think the thing I remembered most was that the show finished at 12.45 a.m., just as the sun was rising, after setting a few minutes previously. In Russia the sun has solved the problem of perpetual motion.

On the whole, I was impressed by the photo-kino department. To me it appeared a really big and efficient organisation for controlling the whole of the Petrograd kino industry, and for inviting co-operation on a wide scale.

There is a very large importation of foreign films, headed by German and American ones. This is calling into existence a separate organisation which belongs to the commercial cinema section. Owing to adverse economic conditions, there are no building operations in progress. There are very ambitious building schemes, particularly in connection with the Prolet-

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kino developments. In a few years the building of proletarian cinemas will be going on at a great speed, for it is proposed to cover Russia with the silver screen. To-day, however, the new population must be content with established cinemas and with makeshift ones in clubs, factories, schools, and elsewhere.

From the editor of the Moscow cinema journal I learnt that to-day Moscow has ninety cinemas. Of these ten are used by the Government as Gos-kinos, forty-five are rented from the Government on a profit-sharing basis. Profits are shared equally between renters and the Government. Thirty-five are private. That is to say, they are held on license and the licencees pay taxes like shopkeepers. Indeed, they are in the position of shopkeepers who are mainly dependent on the Government for permission and materials to carry on. Before the war there were 143 cinemas in Moscow. No increase in this number was made during the war. During the Revolution many cinemas were used for military purposes, and have never recovered their former state. No increase is likely to be made just yet. Petrograd has forty-eight cinemas. Of these, thirty-eight are Gos-kinos, nine are private, and one is a Prolet-kino (*i.e.*, Proletarian Culture kino). There are also three cinemas for children. The Government are beginning to make special films for children, of which travel, history, and adventure are the main features. Among the first products are Christopher Columbus and Baron Munchausen films.

I daresay the close observer would be struck by the difference between the Moscow and Petrograd cinemas, both in an architectural way and in general conditions.

Architecturally, the cinemas are among the best things in Petrograd. Most of them were built just before the war on up-to-date and very elaborate neo-classical lines. All take their cue from the most attractive one, The Splendid, which is really splendid by name and splendid by nature. Speaking of names, it is noteworthy that these cinemas have been allowed to retain theirs, while the streets have undergone considerable re-christening.

Generally speaking, the cinemas retain their pre-war names, the Splendid, the Piccadilly, the Soleil, the Parisiana, the Coliseum, and so on. Besides pictures, they give you an orgy of classical architecture and a good deal of the old pre-war

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softness for your roubles. For these houses, unlike the Moscow ones, are in a really good condition, and the same velvet pile carpets that once tickled the feet of millionaires now tickle the top-boots of Labour.

I cannot say that I altogether like the Petrograd efforts to improve and perfect the cinema theatre. Externally these places are like the classical exhibits in an architectural museum. There is the Parisiana in the Empire style, with its interior resembling the ornate chamber of a palace. There is the Piccadilly in the most approved Greek style, with a circular portico supported by Ionic columns and a frieze of white medallions on a gold ground. Then there is the Soleil with an interior resembling a Roman bath—red and black walls and white reliefs. The Coliseum has an ambitious look. It has a large circular auditorium, and was evidently designed on sumptuous lines. But the builders left it unfinished in 1914, and now it stands with white stone classical details stuck on the bare unplastered red brick walls, looking like an X-rayed picture of itself. If you have a simple taste in architecture, there is the Koloss, which, as its name implies, is a colossal cinema. It is really an excellent example of monumental simplicity without the architectural sugar which makes the other kinos rather tiresome. There is a restfulness in its vast white auditorium which you do not find elsewhere, and which helps you to concentrate on the pictures. The Petrograd cinemas are a clear indication of the neo-classical tendency in architecture which swept over that city before the war, and promised to give it an ancient up-to-date air of magnificence. But their mode of construction does not show that the mode of construction of the cinema has undergone a gradual formative change during recent years owing to the increased recognition of certain influences on its use. One or two are enormous in size. The rest have the common fault of auditoriums designed to hold as much money as possible, regardless of comfort, sight-lines, etc.

The thing that strikes one most about the Moscow cinemas is their unhappy condition. They appear to have experienced the full force of adversity. Ever since the Revolution they have gone from bad to worse, till a year or eighteen months ago they were almost unapproachable. When I inspected these places

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three years ago I made notes on their general condition, which were published in a London cinema journal. Let me make some brief extracts.<sup>1</sup> "I asked a well-known Russian art and dramatic critic to tell me where I could sample the best house and goods under the new conditions. His reply was not hopeful. Neither was he, on the whole. But what can you expect from a dramatic critic who has to live on slops at so many million roubles a spoonful and to work till three in the morning at manual labour to pay for them. 'All the cinemas are filthy—and lousy,' he said. 'Keep away from them or you'll get typhus or a large consignment of lice.'"

I visited the "Mirror" kino, in Tverskoi, another of Moscow's fashionable thoroughfares. As the name implies, the "Mirror" was once a hall of mirrors. When I saw it, it was the remains of mirrors, many of which got bent when the Reds and antis were slaughtering each other. The decorated ceiling had been newly decorated by shot and shell, and had a special ventilation system introduced by the method of dropping eggs from aeroplanes. The windows were patched with odds and ends of timber, and the seats were in splints and looking unusually frowsy. Most of them were just plain wooden benches. Two dim lights made their appearance during the intervals, which were pretty frequent. An ancient screen, suffering from jaundice, and a worn-out projector, buried in an emergency cement structure and half hidden by a dirty curtain as though ashamed of itself, completed the fitments.

The film was a genuine antique of pre-war Russian manufacture. It was in rags, and the reel was so broken that the "curtain fell" every few minutes. The subject, like the one already described, was a compromise with the communist mood. It exhibited the bourgeois life of Petrograd before the war—richly-dressed men and women, gorgeously furnished interiors, costly feeds and the rest of it—but in such a way as to lead the audience to believe that the people who lived it were a rotten lot. As though to destroy any likelihood of the younger generation which have grown up since the Revolution thirsting after these luxurious ways and things, violence of all kinds was introduced.

The Palace was a third example of unrestrained misery

<sup>1</sup> "Kinematograph Weekly."



## THE PROLET-KINO

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Once upon a time it was a Palace-de-luxe, outrivalling in magnificence London's and New York's best. In January, 1922, it was more like a dust-hole with the lid off. I do not know which was the worst picture of depression, the house itself or the film with its large helping of violence, drug-taking, murder, sudden death, and emigration.

I generally found the managers of these melancholy "palaces" seated in state—or in a state—in what appeared to be lumber rooms badly in need of repair and office furniture. The latter recalled the provincial property room after it has vomited its contents on the stage, and the directors and staff strangely recalled the property men. They wore peaked caps, house-blouses and top-boots, and a manner to match.

The managers all had the same story, they were glad to be in business again. But what a time they were having. No money for new films. Not allowed to show what they like. Rents and taxes running into milliards of roubles. Their houses falling to pieces, with no hope of repairing them at present. Prices? Well, they tried to make ends meet by putting up the prices. At the "Palace" seats costs 2,000,000 (two million), 800,000 and 600,000 roubles. At the "Art kino" 1,100,000, 700,000 and 600,000 roubles. At the "Mirror" 2,000,000, 900,000, 700,000 roubles. One film a night was shewn, a serial, or a four-act drama, comedy or farce. There were four houses of one hour each, 6 p.m., 7.30, 9 and 10.30. And notwithstanding the prices and brevity, the proletarians rolled up.

### (ii) THE PROLET-KINO

The Prolet-kino is Russia's speciality. It is said to be a form of cinema which the Russian people want, which has arisen out of their necessity, and which in the future will be a peculiar product of Russia and no other country except that which happens to come into line with Russia.

I put some questions to one of the heads of the Prolet-kino department. Here is the result of my catechism:

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"What is the Proletcult?" A: "A form of proletarian culture which has sprung up in Russia since the Revolution."

"What is a proletarian?" A: "An industrial worker—a wage-earner."

"What is the object of the proletcult movement?" A: "To enable the worker to cultivate his intellectual abilities."

"Is the proletcult movement a demand by the workers themselves to get culture?" A: "Yes."

"Did it exist before the war?" A: "No. The movement began in 1918."

The point that concerns the industry is that a very determined attempt is about to be made by the workers themselves to organise the cinema, so that it shall give them exactly what they want. As the Prolet-kino movement is designed to promote a big and valuable cultural movement, it is worth considering in detail. Whenever I am in Russia I read the Labour papers. Everyone does it except the new bourgeoisie and the illiterates. There are no other papers worth reading. In one of these, "The Workers' Gazette," or "Rabochaja Gazeta," to give it the official title, there has been for some time a front page feature consisting of a column headed "Build the Prolet-kino." Each column is prefaced either by a letter from a reader or an extract from an article or speech by a Government leader. Each calls attention to the great importance of the cinema to Russia and to the new communist society. Perhaps the letter is from a worker who protests against the policy of the Government in exhibiting imported films. He declares he is sick of the "bourgeois poison" provided by the Big Four, Griffiths-Fairbanks-Chaplin, Pickford type of film. "Relieve us of this poison," he cries. "Give us proletarian and revolutionary pictures." He adds a word of thanks to the "Workers' Gazette" for working on behalf of the Prolet-kino.

The extracts are as emphatic in pointing out the need of a Prolet-kino. Says Lunacharsky, the Minister of Education: "Lenin told me many times that among the instruments of art and education, the cinema can and must have the greatest significance for the State. It is a powerful weapon of scientific knowledge and of the most effective agitation. That pro-

<sup>1</sup> "Rabochaja Gazeta," 22 May, 1923.

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fessional unions should recognise its value as a party instrument, and that it should have its own apparatus in the prolet-kino, is a most encouraging sign." Says Kergentseff<sup>1</sup>: "If you open the first page of the Communist Manifesto you will find a dozen subjects ready for production. They are very rich and significant. What can be more interesting to the producer, the decorator, and the author than the reproduction of the history of class war." Says Kameneff<sup>2</sup>: "The cinema is a great means of propaganda when it is in the hands of the proletariat. I wish it length and breadth." Says Gernle<sup>3</sup>: "The cinema has before it a great task, in providing new means to strengthen the forces of the proletarian revolutionary movement." Says Endrle<sup>4</sup>: "We must use every means of propaganda. The cinema is very largely used in Western Europe, and the worker is poisoned every day by its bourgeois pictures."

The gist of the matter is that in Soviet Russia it is considered necessary to establish a form of cinema devoted entirely to an expression of the workers' life, culture and interests. The movement has been received with great enthusiasm. It is eagerly supported by the workers and their journals. The leaders of the Government and trade unionists are united in support of it. They recognise the importance of both the theatre and cinema as party instruments. They regard both as propagandist, agitational and educational institutions. And they regard them as they do other educational institutions, schools, libraries, galleries, etc.

They do not expect to make money out of them, as the capitalist class does, any more than they expect to make money out of a Labour school. They are establishing both in such a way as to pay their own deficits out of funds organised for the purpose.

Beyond this, they aim to make them international. They believe that the workers of the world should have one theatre and one cinema, the business of which is to express the new principles applied to the problems of the working-class life, and in particular those problems made possible in Russia only since power was taken over by the proletariat in 1917, and a new form of relations not only established between the Russian

<sup>1</sup> "Rabochaja Gazeta," 25 May, 1923. <sup>2</sup> 8 June, 1923. <sup>3</sup> 17 June, 1923. <sup>4</sup> "Rabochaja Gazeta," 1 June, 1923.

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workers, peasants, soldiers, etc., themselves, but suggested between the workers and peasants of all other countries.

In the cinema, in particular, they believe they have discovered a powerful instrument which will fully exhibit and expose the old and new conditions, the industrial and economic needs of the workers, will set up a new association between the town and country worker by showing one the technical processes necessary to production, the other the consequent increase of production.

But its greatest importance will lie in opening before the eyes of workers in all parts of the world the new forms of collective industry, and what is being done in the building up of a new industrial world.

Thus the peasants of Russia, even in the remotest districts, would have every opportunity of watching the various stages of the manufacture of the new agricultural implements with which the Soviet Government proposes to supply them, and by this means would become interested in their construction and use.

The promoters of the Proletcult-kino movement propose to establish 50,000 or more screens in Russia. They are to be placed in factories, clubs, schools, and every available place in town and village. The trade unions are especially interested in this movement, and are subscribing liberally.

With the establishment of these screens, no doubt internationalisation will follow. But perhaps not altogether on the lines desired by Russia. While it would be possible to exchange with other countries films illustrating the processes and products of factories and agriculture, it would not be easy to exchange films concerned with revolutionary propaganda.

Russia wants films from England representing the incidents of different revolutions, industrial, political, social, etc., and in addition describing the social and industrial conditions leading to the revolutions.

Who is going to make such films? The Russian workers are free to indulge in revolutionary propaganda, but the English are not, even if they wished. For the moment, internationalisation of the film could take place only on educational lines.

What can the film do? Two of the principal objects of the

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Russian Proletcult kino movement could be attained. The cinema could take the place of the school to a very great extent by teaching by the eye—now recognised by educationalists as a great instrument of education. And it could exhibit pictures of international importance, showing the processes of building up the new industrial world and the new worker set free to his own initiative and abilities.

In short, it could take care of construction and leave destruction to take care of itself. Perhaps, after all, it is construction we want most just now.

This very ambitious scheme has materialised to the extent of the formation of a shareholding society designed to attain its objects. It is called the Prolet Kino Shareholding Association. The Statutes of the Co-operative Society were drawn up in April, 1923, and the object, rights, duties, and responsibility of the society and its members duly published. It is a shareholding company, established for the purpose of enabling the workers to own and control their own cinemas, to be opened in all parts of Russia.

The aim of the Prolet-Kino thus to be established is stated to be "to promote the culture of workers, soldiers, and peasants through the cinema, while using it as a weapon to defend communism."

As to the composition of the society, the principal shareholders are six big trade unions and one Government department.

1. The All-Russia Central Council of Trade Unions.
2. The Moscow County Council of Trade Unions.
3. The Political State Department of the Republic.
4. The All-Russia Trade Union of Artistes (Actors, Painters, etc).
5. The All-Russia Trade Union of Mountain Workers (Miners, Engineers, etc.)
6. The All-Russia Trade Union of Railway Workers.
7. The All-Russia Trade Union of Metal Workers.

The rights include:—

1. The establishment of temporary and permanent cinemas in towns and villages throughout Russia.
2. The buying and selling of films and other technical

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- material from or to their own shareholders or any other persons in Soviet Russia territory.
- 3 The organisation of production in factories.
  4. The publication of books, journals, newspapers dealing with the question of the cinema.
  - 5 The establishment of studios and other experimental centres.
  - 6 The company falls under all the rules and regulations of the Soviet Government, both now and in the future.

The resources of the society.—The principal capital is 600,000 gold roubles, composed of 4,000 nominal shares of 150 roubles each. Workers are invited to become members by the "Workers' Gazette" in the following terms. "Workers and workers' organisations, take shares in the Prolet-Kino. One share costs 150 roubles in gold. Pay half now and the other half later."

Three other facts of capital importance deserve to be recorded. Last June the first Prolet-Kino film was exhibited. It was the signal for an outburst of great enthusiasm on the part of the young proletarians. When I arrived at the great hall where the film was shewn the entrance was packed with a dense crowd of youths and maidens wearing the regulation get-up, blouses, caps, top-boots, head shawls, and red stars. The proceedings were opened by a fiery speaker, who told us what the new cinema would do when fairly launched. Its great work would consist in visualising the "Dreams of the Red Soldier." I did not know exactly what this meant, but I gathered from the concluding picture that it was the liberation of workers throughout the world. The film was mainly topical—sports and fire-brigade drill displays, the great May Day and Curzon Note demonstrations, and a very skilful reconstruction of the murder of the Soviet delegate, Vorovsky, at Lausanne, in Switzerland, and his spectacular funeral in Moscow. The whole thing was meant to impress the audience with the importance of the workers and of communism. When I left at 10.30 there was a dense crowd waiting for the second house. It was so dense that it took me three-quarters of an hour to cut through it. The Prolet-Kino films, then, will be sociological and life-centred, they will concentrate attention on

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the psychological, social, and industrial development of the workers. Special regard will be paid to current events, such as demonstrations, festivals, gymnastic displays, processions, protest meetings, political trials, and significant ceremonies of all kinds.

Simultaneously with this exhibition went the publication of the first number of "The Prolet-Kino." This is an illustrated journal devoted to the aims, national and international, of the movement. It opens with two opinions. "Of all our art, the most important will be the kino" (Lenin), and "the kino is the greatest propagandist when in the hands of the workers" (Kameneff).

The editorial page is taken up with a survey of the possibilities of the internationalisation of the Prolet-Kino. Russia is doing something. Germany is trying to establish a Volkskino. America, too, is trying to establish a Prolet-Kino, but the authorities say NO! very loudly. Other countries find even the thought of the experiment impossible on account of capitalist opposition.

Perhaps the most stirring things are being done and said in the University for film students. This is an institution specially opened by the Government for the preparation of cinema experts. It is part of a proposal to establish special schools for training technicians and players. There are 150 students, divided into four classes: cinema artistes, engineers, decorators, and producers.

A path for the Prolet-kino has been partly prepared. For a long time past the Soviet Government has been trying to spread education by means of fully-equipped cinema trains and motors, by which means the silver screen has found its way to many a remote and outlying district. The result is seen in the appearance of cinemas in out-of-the-way places. Thus one finds in Kemerovo, a little industrial centre in Kuznets Basin, Siberia, not one, but two theatres, each of 1,000 seating capacity, and equipped with excellent moving picture apparatus, as well as a stage and machinery.

In this connection the following note is worth quoting:

"On November 1st, 1918, Lenin inaugurated the first 'Red Train,' which toured the towns and villages of Soviet Russia. From this 'Red Train' of Propaganda over 20,000

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pamphlets and books were sold for ready cash in the first seven days, and 60,000 educational books were distributed freely to various local Soviets. The weekly sale of the 'Isvestia,' also carried on from this train, increased during the same period by 10,000 copies. Twelve mass meetings were held at various stopping places. Travelling with the train were cinematograph operators taking films, and painters making sketches of the life of each town visited. The films and sketches were exchanged in order to acquaint the people of the various districts with each other's mode of life, habits, and dress."

### (iii) THE REVOLUTIONARY KINO

The Revolutionary cinema is an organisation belonging to the Left Wing. Its present object is to exhibit revolutionary films, in particular those expressing the activities of the Red Army. Indeed, it may be said to specialise on the Red Army mainly for the purpose of keeping the revolutionary spirit alive. Once upon a time the Soviet Government embarked on a wild revolutionary film career. But to-day they are specialising on "production" films. That is to say, films shewing the processes and prosperity of the big scale industries in the Urals and other parts of Russia. The object is to stir up the worker to an appreciation of the resources of Russia—resources of which, by the way, he is now the owner.

This change of cinema front, to use a word which Russia loves, is due to several causes. The chief one is that the Government failed to make the revolutionary film business pay. Immediately after the Revolution of October, 1917, a great effort was made to keep up the red spirit. Special studios were organised for producing suitable films, and pictures were taken of all the stirring events, especially the fighting between the Reds and Whites. No details were left out. In the "Taking of Kronstadt"—a film that went starring about Russia for quite a long time—the Reds were seen in full battle array, making mincemeat of the Whites.

Nothing was spared to make these films as realistic and



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plentiful as possible. At one time, during the early period of this particular stunt, they were so numerous that visitors to Russia were usually presented with one or two to take home to show their friends.

On the whole, the Soviet Government spent a vast sum on making revolutionary films. But it was no good. Even the Soviet papers declared the undertaking a failure. The chief cause was the lack of experts (due to the Government policy of exclusion). For nearly ten years there has been no new blood in the Russian film industry, and for this reason it has been slipping right back, till to-day it occupies a place in the universal film world best described as the lower depths.

The Russian film industry needs technical experts, it needs photographers who can take a photo, it needs a proper system of studio lighting. In short, it needs several essential things to give it efficiency.

The Soviet Government are extremely anxious to go full steam ahead with their film making, but neglect the proper steps. Not long ago they decided to make photographic plates on an extensive scale. A big factory was established, and money was thrown in left and right, all to no purpose. Instead of calling in foreign experts, they placed everything in the hands of an inexperienced Russian, who was responsible for the use of an emulsion so bad that the plates were ruined. In the end the Government decided to go out of the photo plate business.

Still, in spite of all reverses, the revolutionary film is not extinct. It will return with a bound to full favour presently, when the money comes rolling in. For the moment a compromise is taking place, and some suitable films are being made with outside assistance—such as that of the Russo-American-German combination. Besides manufacturing revolutionary films, Soviet Russia imports them. There is, for instance, a very good German film called "Miner Thomas," which has been going the round of the Gos-Kinos for quite a long time. It deals with a mine explosion and its meaning to the workers. Russia shews a disposition to open its arms to rejected films. There was one that America would not have at any price. It told the story of a duke who turned communist and tried to start a revolution. America does not want revolutionary

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dukes. It wants dukes with golden coronets on their heads and big banking accounts. So the film came to Russia, and was starred with musical honours. In this way Soviet Russia has become a refuge for persecuted pictures

### (iv) THE BOURGEOIS OR COMMERCIAL KINO

I have already said, the Soviet Government are importing foreign films on a large scale, and a fairly extensive State department has been organised to deal with this business. The work of the department consists in importing the films and distributing them, together with necessary apparatus, to cinemas run by private persons. This means that the Government supply all films and apparatus to the two classes of cinemas—those managed by private persons either in co-operation with the Government or under an agreement which practically leaves all control in the hands of the Government. The films exhibited by these cinemas are of the well-known London, Paris, Berlin, and New York variety. To take only one week's exhibits in Moscow would mean quoting a long list of familiar names, among them "Dr. Caligari," "Dr. Mabuse," "Indian Dance," "Anne Boleyn," "The Lost City," "Daughter of Africa," "The Golem," and "The Foundling." On one occasion Maeterlinck's "Monna Vanna" was shewn at three cinemas simultaneously, and was widely advertised all over the city.

Of course, the Prolet-Kino enthusiasts do not like this importation of films on a big scale. They consider the Government are mad. If so, it is a madness with a method. The Government will tell you that they must keep the cinemas open, for while they are open they are paying rent and taxes. The Government have no present means to make a proper supply of films. Therefore, they must import some. Anyone who examines the imported films and the method of showing them will discover that they are selected and shown with a political propaganda object. Evidently the main aim is to choose films that exhibit the corrupt life of royalty, millionaires, and capitalistic society generally in other countries. There is no

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difficulty in doing this, because so many of the films made outside Russia are concerned with the doings of contemptible characters or characters placed in a contemptible situation. While such films are received in non-revolutionary countries with amusement and indifference, as being highly exaggerated pictures of particular phases of individual and social life, in revolutionary Russia they are received as being truthful pictures of the general life of society outside Russia, and as such they offer a powerful plea for the extermination of capitalistic society. To take an instance, at the Parisiana I saw a French film, "The Yellow Mask." It was an historical story written round Louis XIV and Cardinal Mazarin. It was just the sort of picture of a weak king and an ambitious, intriguing Cardinal, that in London (say) would be followed with curiosity, and with interest on account of its technique. In Russia its suggestion of the false, corrupt, and rotten life of court and church would have great educational and propaganda value. A king spending his time in the arms of his mistresses, and a Cardinal plotting to murder the king's brother, are the things they want in Russia just now to strengthen communism. And the Government know it.

I think it is Shakespeare who is reported as having said, "There is nothing really good or bad but thinking makes it so." The remark applies to the imported films. In countries outside Russia they are seen through sentimental spectacles, and are silly, clever, amusing, as the case may be. In Russia they are seen through communist spectacles, and are instructive accordingly. Occasionally the Government exhibit an imported film, followed by a home-made one. The latter serves to strengthen the message of the imported one. In so doing, they follow a device used in the Revolutionary theatre. Above the centre of the stage there is a fixed screen upon which messages are flashed as the play proceeds. The object of these messages is to counteract the effect of the play action. For instance, suppose there is a scene in which the White Army is seen temporarily to advantage. Instantly the screen gets to work telling the audience that the White Army must be destroyed and the Red Army alone must be triumphant. Imagine a famous poisoning scene in a London theatre. Imagine the bad doctor just about to administer the fatal pills.

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Then imagine a warning appearing on a screen above the doctor's head, "Don't take Blank's Pills; they're poison." This is meant for the audience, not for the victim.

So by contrasted or complimentary films the Government keep the propaganda ball a-rolling. At the Union kino a stupid American stunt film is followed by a hot and strong revolutionary one, exposing the tyranny of the old ruling class. We see the "upper crust" as it were indulging in an orgy of rapine, murder, and seduction, supported by the Cossacks. The leading character is an aristocratic Russian Robin Hood. He lives the life of an aristocrat in order to gain possession of the wealth of his fellow-aristocrats, with which he keeps a rather large family of persecuted proletarians, who apparently live in the cellar of his commodious mansion. On the whole, it is naive stuff, but it has a communistic value.

Again, though the stuff imported is generally recognised to be bad in sentiment, that is, from a communist point of view, most of it is very good in technique, and thus it serves the useful purpose of calling the attention of operators and technicians to improvements, and stimulates research. But the fall from grace is only temporary. In two years or so the Government expect to have a full supply of their own home-made films.

Finally, there are the Soviet Government's international film activities. These appear to be, at present, confined to the production of films by the Workers' International Russian Relief in co-operation with other bodies.

Not long ago I saw one of the first of the new proletarian films, intended for the world market. As far as I could judge, a compromise had been attempted. The plot was an adaptation of one of Tolstoy's books. It should be said that both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, two of Russia's greatest writers, are being adapted to the film in Moscow and Petrograd. Both are suited to the new proletarian purpose. Tolstoy is a Bolshevik with strong Western leanings, that is, he is, according to Spengler, an outstanding German philosopher, a Bolshevik at root, in sympathy with Western civilisation. Of course, the Moscow Bolsheviks welcome his Bolshevism, but they do not like his love of Western civilisation. Dostoevsky is, according to Spengler and Nietzsche, the true representative of the coming



#### THE ALL-RUSSIA CINEMA.

Above:—The President of All-Russia Photo Kino Soviet or Clerks' Committee, Petrograd. He is seen as a war prisoner in Germany. Below: Moskvina, of the Moscow Art Theatre, as Polikushka, in a film of that name. This was the first new Russian film. The story is an adaptation of Tolstoi's picture of the land-owning class and serfs 100 years ago. Polikushka is seen about to hang himself.



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Russia. He is a typical Russian who wants a Russian civilisation of his own, and does not like Western civilisation. There is a third author, Maxim Gorky, who may possibly be used for proletarian films. He is a representative of the suppressed against the suppressor. It is necessary to understand this distinction in order to realise the elements which are likely to appear in the new films.

The Tolstoy film is called "Polikushka." It is in six parts. It was produced by the Motion Pictures Co-operative Society, Russia, Moscow. The proprietors of the world monopolies are the Industrie and Handels A.G., International Workmen's Help for Soviet Russia, and Motion Pictures Department for Soviet Russia. According to one of the titles, the artistes of the Motion Picture Co-operative Society, Russia, produced this film while suffering the pangs of cold and hunger during Russia's worst period of want. Very often they had nothing but a plateful of hot soup and a few frozen potatoes, but in spite of this they worked long after midnight in studios which could not be heated, although the winter was the severest on record, as neither wood, peat, nor coal could be obtained.

The events of the "tragedy" take place about 100 years ago in a district of Russia belonging to Tolstoy's family. They are selected to show the pitiable condition of the peasants under the old land-owning class before the abolition of serfdom.

Polikushka, the illiterate, drunken, thieving peasant, moves through all the pictures like an unwinding skein of interest, evoking our sympathy for the deplorable condition of himself and his fellow-serfs, and our resentment against the class who are responsible for it. A very powerful motive is introduced in the form of a large sum of money. Polikushka, although a drunken thief with a very bad record, is sent by his mistress to draw this money, and he is so impressed, not only by the large amount entrusted to him, but by the importance of being sent for it, that in spite of all sorts of temptations he strictly guards it. He puts it in the lining of his cap, but unfortunately the packet works through a hole and is lost. Polikushka is so overcome with grief at the loss that he hangs himself.

This part affords wide scope for very powerful acting by a leading member of the Moscow Art theatre company, J. M. Moskvín, and the acting of the numerous other parts, even the

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smaller, is distinguished by a natural spontaneity and feeling.

Beside this Tolstoy film there is a film "adapted" from a play called "Raskonikov," taken from one of Dostoievsky's books. The feature of this film is that it exhibits the first Russian play taken bodily, bag and baggage, from the stage and transferred to the film. Certain critics are sceptical about the wisdom of this proceeding. They maintain that the machine has not been invented which can express the infinite and delicate shades of meaning belonging to the soul of Dostoievsky's characters. Which is another way of saying that theatrical representation is one thing and film representation is another.

In conclusion, it is reasonable to prophecy that the Russian cinema has a great future before it, both as an instrument of social enlightenment and in actively assisting in the good work of internationalism, especially that part which relates to the union of the working classes of all nations. What particular method it will follow is not clear as yet. It might take the revolutionary path and it might not. Some of its extreme supporters in Russia have a vision of a socialist mass film similar in construction to, but different in meaning from, "The Birth of a Nation," in which the people themselves could take part. But as P. M. Kergentseff, one of the supporters of the socialist mass film idea, is careful to point out, the socialist cinema has done nothing as yet. It has got all its work before it. But the Russian cinema is in danger of being misunderstood by friendly and neutral countries if opinions of this kind alone appear in print. The best thing to say about the future of the Russian cinema is that it will seek to fulfil the high purpose of expressing the soul of New Russia. If it does so truthfully, no one can ask more. If it does so truthfully, I venture to say that it is bound to fulfil its chief object. It will fulfil the function of social and international service. It will reconcile the two great classes of Russian society, the workers and peasants. Beyond this, it will unite these with the vital classes of the world.



## CHAPTER XXII

### *SUMMARY AND CRITICISM*

I HAVE shewn in the foregoing chapters that a new theatre has arisen in Soviet Russia which stands practically alone.

There is no theatre like it in any other country in the world. It is a theatre so utterly different to any other as to challenge one's wonder why so little is known of it outside Russia. It may be that, as I have pointed out, visitors to Russia within the last three or four years have been drawn from classes who do not understand this kind of social institution.

By a careful analysis and synthesis of facts, I have sought to show that the new and unique thing about this theatre is a unity. I mean it is a theatre composed of many theatres, in fact of all the theatres there are in Russia. It is not a theatre made up of a number of separate and unrelated bits, like the theatre of England, or America, or France. It forms an organism, every part of which has a function, whilst all parts function as one.

Underlying all the theatres of which it is composed, and binding them together is one simple and single idea which acts like a faith. It is the idea of social service without acquisitive gain. It is the idea that the theatre is an institution belonging to the people. This institution once grew out of their inner need, and it must now return to its original plan of serving their utmost purpose. It is an instrument for the full expression of themselves, their memories, their present lives, and their aspirations; their past, present, and future. It is a playground wherein they may recreate themselves and their surroundings and their occupations. And in so doing, unfold towards the heights. So thoroughly has this idea established itself that even the old conservative theatres, like the Moscow

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Art theatre, have been drawn definitely within the circle, and may be said to be doing something to crush the spirit of exclusive commercial monopoly in public theatrical exhibitions, and to place the whole theatre well under the control of the people themselves and their chosen representatives.

The idea has given birth to different theories of method. A diversity of opinion has arisen concerning the best method of giving the theatre and dramatic interpretation and representation an essential form. That is to say, the form most suited to the new conception of theatrical social service. As a result, the New theatre has divided off into three sections, each of which seeks a form of dramatic communication harmonising with the particular theatrical policy which its supporters recognise.

The three divisions are:—

1. The Left Group.
2. The Centre Group
3. The Right Group.

The Left Group includes all the extreme radicals, all who wish to give the theatre an extreme communistic form. The Centre Group includes all the moderates, all who wish to give the theatre a popular cultural-educational form. The Right Group includes all theatres which are tolerated rather than sanctioned by the Government and Left extremists. Their directors wish to give the theatre an independent (that is, individualistic form), while conforming as far as possible to the new collective spirit of the workers.

I have analysed the conception, organisation, and method of every theatre in each of the three groups, with the result that I have revealed practically every theory and practice to be found associated with the reform of the modern theatre during the last 100 years. Moreover, in doing so I have glanced at the most important historical influences on the modern theatre. These are the Greek Mass theatre, the Italian *Commedia dell'arte* theatre, and so on.

I have shewn that each of the groups is concerned, first of all, with the great ever-present problems of unity by means of dramatic communication, and thereafter, more or less deeply,

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with the problems arising from it. These are four in number:

1. A new type of actor, and a new system of acting.
2. A new species of play
3. A new form of stage.
4. A new style of scenery.

There is another problem, the structural form of the theatre, which, however, does not occupy the attention of the Russian men of the theatre at present, except those who are concerned with mass performances on a vast scale. The latter are glancing back at the Greek arena.

I say "more or less deeply" because the Centre and Right Groups are still preoccupied with traditional forms. But the young insurgents in their midst are seeking to break with these forms and to come into line with the Left. Their practices and spirit clearly show that the Left Group is, in their opinion, the real birthplace of the new theatre and its vital and informative ideas.

I have considered the various proposals to solve these five pressing problems. As to the first problem of unity, the solution yields:—

1. Theatrical or subjective unity (Meierhold).
2. Semi-theatrical or objective-subjective unity (Tairov).
3. Stage or objective unity (Stanislavsky).

According to the first, the spectator is drawn into the action and becomes an actor. According to the second, the spectator is passively receptive. According to the third, the spectator is entirely passive.

As to the other four problems, the solutions yield:—

1. A brain and body disciplined actor, produced according to theories of the Machine and bio-mechanics.
2. Improvised forms of play-making.
3. A stage designed to remove the limitations of the auditorium both for collective and individualistic performances.

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4. Essential scenery. That is, scenery that aids acting and not merely clogs it up with decoration.

Along with these solutions go certain new theories, constructivism, bio-mechanics, and titanism.

There are also the theories of the Mass theatre. These are admirably dealt with in P. M. Kergentseff's "Creative Theatre," (Tvorcheski Teatr). They fall under the three heads of voluntarism, co-operation, and improvisation. The author proposes a return to the mass and open-air dramatic pageantry of the Middle Ages, but on a much vaster scale and with the religious motive replaced by a socialist one. I have given examples of mass performances which fully illustrate his ideas. These are the "Storming of the Winter Palace" and the dramatisation of the "Communist Manifesto."

Looking at the unity of the New theatre, what significance can it be said to have for the English theatre? It stands for the realisation of a tendency which exists in our midst, and which dominates the thoughts of many serious persons directly interested in the English theatre—the movement for the establishment of a National theatre for the representation of the drama under the protection of the people themselves. This movement, which had its beginning years ago in the attempt to establish a National Shakespearean theatre, has come into full favour again. It is to be hoped that the renewed attempt to establish it will take into consideration the social developments which have taken place since the beginning of the war, when the movement was pushed into the background. Such developments show conclusively that events have set in motion a set of influences which have undermined the old conception of a National theatre as a single structure designed to exhibit classical and modern plays. The new conception of a National theatre is that of a theatre or theatres, in any one of which may be found a species of entertainment known as "popular." In other words, an expression of the life and spirit of the people by the people. The new Russian theatre is this true form of National theatre.

What of the future of the Russian theatre? A new theatre has arisen owing to the transference of power to the workers and peasants and the consequent liberty to create arising out of this. The old theatre is trying feebly to reassert itself

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owing to the present unfortunate economic situation, which prevents the Government continuing to subsidise certain theatres.

But while the workers continue to control factories and means of production they will control capital, control their own institutions, and continue to make institutions for their own use. Thus the old capitalistic ones will be forced to adapt themselves to the new conditions or will disappear altogether. It may be that before long we shall see the old academic theatre and the old commercial theatre definitely in retreat. At any rate, at the moment an immense curiosity consumes the Russian workers—the curiosity to know and see their new life and world. They are pressing into the theatre, which promises to open the door on these things and to initiate them into their mysteries. It is for this reason that Moscow has become the Mecca of true theatricality.

This conclusion is supported by P. M. Kergentseff, who remarks in his "Creative Theatre":—"Now after a conflict of nearly four years about the new theatre, it may be said that in Soviet Russia it has become firmly rooted, and all vital forces have joined it or are about to join it. The same process is observed here as in other spheres of Soviet work with the specialists and intelligentsia after their long fight against the Soviet power, gradually increasing the ranks of the energetic workers and assisting in the construction of the new future. If one compared the theatrical work of Soviet Russia with that of Western Europe and America, it may definitely be stated that *Russia since the Revolution has attained extraordinary successes in the sphere of the theatre of which Europe has not the slightest idea.*" My italics. All this is extremely encouraging. A new theatre has arisen to celebrate the rebirth of a mighty nation. But at the moment it has assumed a revolutionary form. This is not enough. It must pass from the revolutionary to an evolutionary one. It must not continue to exhibit a people with their backs to the wall fighting their way out of confusion with material weapons. It must replace this picture by another revealing a people definitely unfolding under the touch of inner spiritual necessity. The future of the Russian theatre belongs to the soul of the Russian people, and to those who know how to communicate this soul by spiritual

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rather than mechanistic means. For the present, King Machine is the director of the theatre. King Machine will play his essential part, and then die a natural death. Or should one say, an unnatural one?

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### I.

*The Theatrical Situation in Soviet Russia in 1923. Communicated to the author by A. Lunacharsky, People's Commissariat for Education.*

The theatre system at the present time in Russia is as follows:—

The former imperial theatres in Moscow and Petrograd, and also the Moscow Art theatre, a very interesting advanced theatre (the "Clamher" (Kamerny) Theatre), the Jewish Central Theatre, and a few dramatic studios, are considered purely State theatres. They receive a considerable State subsidy, in consideration of which they place 15 per cent. of all seats in every part of the theatre at the disposal of the workers at extremely reduced rates.

All theatrical property generally, with the exception of that belonging to individual actors, has been nationalised, and is under the control of the Soviets of those provinces in which the theatres stand. Some Soviets run the theatres themselves, others lease them. At all events, the theatres are under the constant observation of the chief of the departments of popular education.

The theatres pursue various ends, principally cultural. The State theatres bear the title of "Academic," and attempt first and foremost to be a model in the artistic sense. Their repertoire has changed very little, as it was always of a very high standard. The inclusion of revolutionary plays in the repertoire is almost impracticable, in consequence of the absence of completely artistic plays of that type. However, the Academic theatre in Petrograd (the former Alexandrinsky) has staged Lunacharsky's play, "Faust and the City," while the Moscow academic small theatre has staged "Oliver Cromwell," also by Lunacharsky.

The other theatres fall quite definitely under three distinct heads. The majority have lately been pursuing the aim only of amusement. It must be stated, however, that a fairly strict control over them keeps these theatres at a much higher level than their counterpart in Western Europe and America, as was noted incidentally in his last writings by Mr. Emile Vandervelde, who is not exactly a sympathiser with Soviet Russia.

A second group, much smaller, is constituted by those theatres which are privately owned, but attempt to carry out purely cultural work. There is a fair number of such theatres in Moscow and Petrograd, and they are also to be found in the provinces. They show considerable vitality, and have

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staged many revolutionary plays of an artistic-agitational type. Amongst them may be mentioned the Petrograd popular theatre, the Petrograd large dramatic theatre, the Moscow Comedy theatre (formerly Korsh), the "Actors' theatre," under the management of the well-known Meierhold: the "Karl Marx" theatre at Saratov, and, properly speaking, outside the boundaries of Soviet Russia, the extremely interesting popular theatre at Tiflis.

The third group is constituted by the agitational theatres. Under this heading fall the theatres of the so-called "Proletcult" (the Workers' Cultural League), and the theatre of Revolutionary Satire in Moscow, controlled by the Moscow Soviet.

### II

A. It would be impossible to indicate exact prices in Soviet roubles, as prices change owing to the constant fall in the value of the rouble. At all events, one can say definitely that the price is not more than half of what was paid before the Revolution. This rule applies both to the dear and to the free seats.

B. The following are plays of proletarian spirit which might be recommended for Britain: Mayakovsky, "Mysteria bouffes"; Kamensky, "The Locomotives' Mass"; the agitational plays of Reisner; amongst my plays, "The Chancellor and the Locksmith" is being translated into English by Comrade Vengerova, and "Oliver Cromwell" by Madame Kropotkina.

C. There are two children's theatres in Moscow owned by the State and the Moscow Soviet. There are also two or three such theatres in the provinces.

D. On the subject of purely proletarian theatres, I should point out that quite recently the Proletcult had an enormous number of studios and two theatres in Russia (Moscow and Petrograd), and also one theatre each in Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbeidjan. At the present moment a considerable number of the studios have closed, as well as the Petrograd proletarian theatre; while the Proletcult generally, which had up to half a million members, is having to reduce its activities in consequence of the cessation of those large subsidies from the State which were made in the first years of the Revolution, but which have become impossible with the new economic policy.

In the proletarian theatres, as far as I know, the following plays were given: "The Mexican," an adaptation of Jack London; "The Lena," a play by Pletnev; "Hunger," by Andreiev; "The Avengers," an adaptation from Claudel; my play, "Vassilissa the Wise" (in the proletarian theatre at Tiflis), and some others.

E. Cinematograph production was cramped throughout by the absence of films, and has only recently begun to develop again.

F. An extremely vivid illustration of what the New theatre is like has been the organisation of certain mass performances in the open air. There were some in Moscow, but mostly in Petrograd. Amongst them the most notable was "The Taking of the Winter Palace," played at the Winter Palace itself last year, and a political fantastical drama, performed on the islands at Petrograd.

### III

General education in Russia takes the form of the unitary labour school, which, of course, as yet cannot take in all the children. It covers up to 60



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per cent. in its first four (elementary) classes, and not more than 10 per cent. of all the children in the upper (secondary) classes.

Work amongst adults is carried on by the so-called Chief Political Education Department, and at first had extremely far-reaching plans. It was proposed in the course of ten years completely to eradicate illiteracy. The prolonged crisis and the famine have necessarily lengthened this period.

Art is very widely utilised for propaganda purposes. We created a great series of placards, and also utilised the cinematograph (our famous agitation trains), and the theatre. Our agitation dramatic groups travelled all over Russia and reached the depths of Siberia. Of late this work has also been held up by the lack of resources, but we shall return to it with the revival of our industry.

### APPENDIX B

#### *SYMPOSIA ON THE NEW RUSSIAN THEATRE*

##### *CONDUCTED BY HUNTLY CARTER*

During one of my visits to Russia, I put certain questions on the theatre to some prominent men concerned with its theory and practice. Some replies were verbal, others written. I give three of the latter.

Briefly the questions were:—

1. Can the two functions of the theatre, social service and acquisitive gain, be separated?
2. To what extent has the new Russian theatre been separated from money?
3. Could a one-function theatre, that is, a theatre devoted solely to social service, be established in a capitalistic country like England?
4. If so, how?

##### *A. LUNACHARSKY, People's Commissariat for Education and Art.*

As for the questions interesting you, I reply as follows:—

Of course, it is possible to separate the financial side from the artistic, but in what sense? To the extent that theatres depend on their income, they will never be able completely to defend their repertoire from the necessity of adjusting it to the tastes of the public, but I do not see very great danger in this as yet. A clever director could quite well take account of the tastes of the public and raise their level. It seems to me that this is impossible as regards the haute bourgeoisie and the middle classes. The tastes of these classes are such that, in my opinion, you cannot build an art theatre on them in any country. Matters stand quite differently with the intelligentsia, students, and the proletariat (and the peasants in the villages, of whom I shall not speak here). The intelligentsia and semi-bourgeois youth at the universities in many countries—I should imagine in England, too—could quite well be influenced by an art theatre. The only essential is that it should not degenerate into those petty aesthetising and sectarian theatres which are usually created in Europe specially for the intelligentsia, and are really the best of the European theatres. On the whole, the intelligentsia is not strong enough to support large theatres. Hence this degeneration of the modern art theatre to small studios (for example, the Old Dovecote Theatre of Copeau).

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Now, the question is, can the theatre for the proletariat be combined with the theatre for the intelligentsia? I think that it can, absolutely. The proletariat certainly does not demand the lowering of the theatre to its own tastes, which, statically considered, are, of course, not polished. The point is that the proletariat is capable of gigantic steps forward. The proletariat may get drunk, go to see bad cinema films, and fill the halls of bad cabarets, but I not only believe, but know that the appearance of a serious theatre which deals with the vital problems of the proletariat, while at the same time it is vivid, and could include clever melodrama and witty farce, could extremely develop a new type of theatre-goer amongst the workers. You know, of course, of large scale attempts of this kind in Berlin; the Schiller, the Volksbühne, etc.

Now we immediately come to this question. Can this better public, *i.e.*, the advanced and more energetic section of the intelligentsia and the gradually increasing vanguard of the proletariat, support a large art theatre? I believe this with difficulty. First of all, you have to reckon with the tastes of this public (which, I repeat, does not necessarily mean the degradation of the theatre), and very few know how to do this. Directors of this type, too often are obsessed by their own ideas or over-emphasise the importance of *chefs d'œuvre* of the old literature, or else suffer from a lack of dramatists who could write plays for this special public.

Before the new economic policy in Russia the question was settled quite simply. The State maintained the theatres, so to speak, out of its own resources. There was no lack of public; it filled all the theatres free or at an extremely low charge. But Russia is as yet an economically impoverished country, and we cannot now carry on experiments on such a wide footing as before. In going into the question in detail I will say, for example, that in Moscow in this sense there are only the following undertakings—the Revolutionary theatre of the Moscow Soviet, the Proletcult theatre, and now and then separate plays of the so-called ward theatres. This, of course, is very little. The remainder of the theatres may be classified into two groups. First, those who the State has left to their own resources, and who are obliged to look for the paying public, *i.e.*, the speculators, first and foremost, and to a certain extent civil servants, who are at all well paid. Adjustment to the tastes of this public, generally speaking, immediately lowered the level of the theatre. But I think even in this sphere lamentations have been over-done. We have amongst just this kind of theatre some very interesting experiments. For example, certain plays staged in the Comedy theatre (formerly Korsh), and the formally Revolutionary, and often revolutionary in essence, attempts of our paradoxical regisseur, Meierhold. His theatre bears the name, "Theatre of the State Institute of Dramatic Art," but in reality does not receive State support, and nevertheless relying only on the box-office, carries on the above-mentioned policy, which, personally, indeed, does not satisfy me greatly, but unquestionably is courageous. The other sections of the theatres have to receive a considerable subsidy from the State, and *ipso facto* are in less dependance on their income from sales of tickets. In the central theatres of this type very solid work is going on, continuing the old traditions which have already made the Russian theatres almost the best in Europe—as you can see from the exceptional success of the State Art theatre in Europe and America, and the enthusiastic declarations of foreigners about our other art, opera and dramatic theatres. Amongst the State theatres there is also the comparatively large Kamerny theatre which hitherto, albeit foreign to political, proletarian, and revolutionary ideology, was, from the formal point of view, revolutionary and bold. Its present striking success in Paris again bears witness to the fact that it was

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able to achieve great artistic results in spite of the fact that the State supported it only to the extent of 50 or even 33 per cent. It should be said, however, that in Moscow now we have a fairly considerable body of extremely intelligent theatre-goers who are very sensitive to the theatre.

I must particularly mention that the large theatres mentioned above maintain also studios supported by the State, some of which are themselves considerable theatres by now. It is in these theatres that the more advanced work is being done. They have no lack of public, although the small halls in which they have to work do not afford them an opportunity of paying their own way.

Here is your sketch of dramatic Moscow on which you can base your own conclusions. From it you will get the replies to your questions 1, 2, and 3. Concerning the fourth, I cannot tell you anything. If in Russia it has been possible to a very partial extent to separate the economic side from the artistic, in England, I fear, it will be even more difficult. How can it be achieved? There are only three ways—State support, patronage of individuals, and the support of some special groups, *e.g.*, trade unions. If the English trade unions or the powerful British co-operatives would agree to finance a real art theatre intended to satisfy and at the same time to develop the tastes of the better section of the intelligentsia and the proletariat, England could, of course, certainly realise that ideal theatre to which we in Russia, in fact, are as yet only aspiring.

V. F. PLETNEV, *Chairman of Proletcult and the Proletcult Theatre.*

### *Answers to Questions 1 and 2.*

Both in the centre and in the districts the repertoire of the proletcult theatres from the very first was drawn up without any consideration for its commercial value. We always were guided in our work by two considerations only:—

1. Propaganda of the idea of the proletarian revolution.
2. The organisation of a new class theatre in our daily and ceaseless struggle with the dying old theatre.

When our studio workers during acute moments of the civil war were in the position of danger at the fronts, carrying on agitation by means of their heroic repertoire in the Red Army—even stepping straight from the theatre to the trenches, it would have been fantastic to think of the financial and commercial aspect of the theatre.

At the present moment, local theatrical studios, composed of workers at a given factory, and intended for the workers of that factory or a group, work as a general rule from 16 to 24 hours a week. Studios begin at 7 p.m., and continue till 11 or 12 at night, and some times later. (Don't forget that we have the eight-hour working day). The comrades working in the theatre receive no pay, and to none of them does it ever occur to demand it.

The central studios of the Proletcult with comrades who have devoted themselves only to the building up of a class proletarian theatre, are at work from 10 a.m. to 9-11 p.m., with short breaks for dinner, tea, and rest, amounting in all to two hours. There is no compulsion: it is a pure voluntary initiative. The leaders have to switch off the lights to force the workers to stop. The workers occupied in the studios receive lodging (in a hostel), firing, lighting, and a scholarship of 75 to 120 millions at current exchange rates (June 1), from 1.5 to 2.1 gold roubles monthly.

The results are such as we have desired. The work and achievements Mr. Huntly Carter has had an opportunity of seeing for himself. The technique in the local studios is developing satisfactorily, particularly in the direction

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of quoting our communist message in suitable ideological form. Hence there are no commercial tendencies amongst our dramatic workers. They don't work for the box-office or for the owner, but for the proletarian masses and the revolution. All they require is the necessary equivalent for restoring the energy they have expended. There have been moments in our work when our students had not even this—during the period of blockade and civil war. They did not abandon the work for a moment, however, and when it was necessary went to the front; there are glorious names in our students' list who fell at the front in the civil war. This is our pride.

Until the complete transformation of the artistic product of the theatre out of a commodity into the production of values for the satisfaction of consciously controlled public requirements their struggle will continue.

*To Question 3.*

Yes, of course.

*To Question 4.*

The path of Soviet Russia. If the English comrades can achieve this without a violent change of the British social order, we wish them every success, but frankly we have little hope of the possibility of such an elastic attitude towards the revolution, if only from the point of view of Lord Curzon. Real facts tell the reverse. Every other path will be incorrect and a compromise. To transfer the theatre entirely from the hands of the bourgeois to the hands of the proletariat is absolutely impossible without a conflict. The theatre is the ideological weapon of the bourgeoisie, and it will not abandon the theatre without a bitter struggle. The struggle of the proletariat for its class culture is a process of the class struggle. Class conflicts cannot be settled without an acute struggle, and we are of an entirely different opinion from the leaders of the British trade unions, who think that class conflicts can be settled by dinners with the King of England. The dinner will be eaten, but a revolution will take place just the same. The most correct thing that the British proletariat can do is at once to begin building its own proletarian theatre on the following principles:—

1. To understand clearly and definitely that bourgeois art generally is the workers' worst enemy; and the theatre in particular.
2. To remember that the building of a proletarian class culture, in particular of the theatre, is a process of the class struggle with all the consequences arising therefrom.
3. To maintain a spirit of decisiveness, persistence, clear revolutionary class-consciousness and unshakable confidence in his own work—learning in this from the Communist International.
4. To learn to work for his theatre without looking at his watch and calculating the value of the minutes and hours lost in pence.
5. Not to think about the box-office.

P. M. KERGENTSEFF, *late Soviet Consul at Stockholm, author of "The Creative Theatre," and other theoretical works on the theatre.*

We should regard the theatre as we regard other educational institutions. We do not expect to gain money out of the British Museum or the London School of Economics. The good theatre is bound to shew a financial deficit until the public understand its true meaning and significance. In Russia very few really good theatres pay. Only bad theatres are commercially prosperous. But this is not an argument against the good theatre.

In England, trade unions, county councils, and other working-class and municipal bodies must have their own theatres and meet any deficit out of

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funds provided for the purpose. In Russia there always have been many good theatres owned by municipalities and the State. It is one of the reasons why "the art of the theatre" has been successful.

To-day in Russia the best and really artistic theatres are subsidised by the State, local Soviets, trade unions, co-operative bodies, etc. Such private theatres as exist are commercially successful, but they have no art value of any kind. It is evident that the return to normal economic conditions in Russia promises well for the good theatre, because it will put the State in a better position to spend more on the best, that is, the artistic and educational theatres.

In England it is impossible wholly to transfer the theatre to the workers. That can only be done after a revolution. But it is possible for workers' organisations like trades unions and co-operatives to organise their own labour theatres with new plays, new methods, and new actors. It is important to organise as many little theatres as possible with volunteer staffs and casts drawn from the workers. A movement of the kind would help to reorganise the established theatre and to prepare the ground for a new theatre.

The conditions in England are very difficult for starting a new theatre. I lived in London three years and a half, and I know something about Englishmen. To me they appear to have no theatrical instinct. As for the theatre culture, it is very low. A very good instance of this is found in the neglect of Shakespeare. Your writers say a lot about him, but your public seldom go to see his plays. Shakespeare is played often and interpreted in a highly intelligent manner in Russia and Germany, but not in England or the United States. It is because the English and American peoples are not theatrical peoples. Moreover, the public taste has been perverted by commercial dramatic critics.

## APPENDIX C

### THE ALL-RUSSIA UNION OF ART WORKERS

*From a collection of documents first published in 1920 and issued by the Central Committee of the All-Russia Union of Art Workers. The Union still exists, but it has been affected by the New Economic Policy of 1921.*

After the February Revolution more than fifteen art unions were created in Russia. These unions were independent and in no way connected with each other. (1) The National Union of Musical Art Workers; (2) The National Union of Actors; (3) The National Union of Scenic and Arena Artists; (4) Union of Circus Actors; (5) Union of Kino Workers; (6) Union of Actors of the private ballet; (7) Union of Stage Workers (theatrical hair-dressers, scene shifters, dress-makers, etc.); (8) Union of Stage Employees (cloak-room attendants, wardrobe keepers, etc.); (9) Union of Photographic Workers; (10) Union of Painters; (11) Union of Artists of the New Art; (12) Union of Sculptors; (13) Union of Artists of Applied Arts and Art Industries; (14) Union of Engravers; (15) Union of Architects; (16) Union of Composers, etc.

All these above-mentioned narrow-corporative and craft unions were never of great importance. Actors in a theatre entered one union, orchestra players joined another, stage workmen a third, etc. All these unions issued different instructions—and it is not to be wondered at that since the Revolu-

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tion the Art Workers decided to create one large union, which was finally formed in the beginning of 1919. At the present moment the All-Russia Union of Art Workers unites workers in all branches of art and enters with equal rights into the family of proletarian unions, headed by the All-Russia Central Council of Trade Unions. All these above-mentioned unions joined hands and formed one big Union of Art Workers, including all actors of the drama, opera, ballet, cinematograph, circus and music hall; managers, ballet-masters, music conductors, composers, dramatists and authors of cinematograph scenarios, musicians (including those in the Red Army and the Fleet), chorus singers (including church and synagogue choristers, chapel masters, organ players, etc.), cinematograph operators, acrobats, clowns, circus riders and riding masters, trainers, athletes, wrestlers, gymnasts, couplet singers and other music hall actors, theatre artists (scene painters, property men, etc.), as well as image painters, photographers, workers in the kino-ateliers, theatrical hair-dressers and costumiers, dress-makers, shoe makers, carpenters, electrical engineers, house painters, theatre servants, watchmen, circus saddlers and stable boys. The great employees (managers, cashiers, controllers, etc.), and the door keepers, Chaliapine as well as the simple ticket porter, enter with equal rights into the union. We must add that the union includes also tuners of musical instruments, musical instrument makers, teachers in all branches of art as well as employees in picture galleries and museums and all employees in the following departments of the People's Commissariat for Education: (1) The Theatre Department; (2) Music Department; (3) Photographic and Cinematographic Department; (4) Department of Fine Arts; (5) Department for the safe-keeping of museums and monuments of antiquity.

Each theatre, circus, cinematograph, and workshop has a local committee which is the primary organ of the union. The functions of the latter are the same as the functions of local factory committees in other unions. At the present time the union numbers nearly 150,000 members, and has branch offices in more than 150 towns.

The All-Russian Congress of Art Workers, which was held in Moscow in May, 1919, elected a central committee composed of five musicians, one composer, five actors, three kino players, two music hall actors, one juggler, three stage workmen (one dress maker, one carpenter, and one mechanic), one painter, and one sculptor.

The union unites all the Art Workers without any consideration of their political opinions. The union has a communist fraction which exercises great influence.

The principal question dealt with by the union is the salary question. Detailed rates are settled for every category, and are strictly based on grades of skill.

Under the reign of the Tsar the artists were in a miserable position; now they are in better conditions than other workers. Before the Revolution theatres played every day; theatre workers did not know what rest was. Now, according to a decree of the Soviet Government, all theatre workers have their holiday on Monday instead of Sunday, because it would be unreasonable to deprive working people of theatres on Sunday. Before the Revolution managers and impresarios took from theatre workers everything they could. Now, all theatres are nationalised and are administered by a collegiate board, which includes representatives of the Union of Art Workers. The union has also its representative in the collegiate boards of the Art Section of the Commissariat of Education and in the corresponding departments of local Soviets.

Art is International. Artists have always been Internationalists

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## APPENDIX D

A TYPICAL MOSCOW WEEKLY THEATRE POSTER.

25-30 April, 1922.

№ 10.

СПЕЦИАЛЬНАЯ СВОДНАЯ ТЕАТРАЛЬНАЯ АФИША С 25-го по 30-е АПРЕЛЯ 1922 г.

Ежедневно официального стола Московского Управления Театрами.

ТЕАТРЫ	Вторник, 25	Среда, 26	Четверг, 27	Пятница, 28	Суббота, 29	Воскресенье, 30	Цирковые
Большой Театр	Корсар	Корсар	Снегурочка	Встань Осия	Сказка о царе Салтане	Дон-Кихот	Илья Муромец
Государственный Театр	Князь Игорь	Князь Игорь	Князь Игорь	Князь Игорь	Князь Игорь	Князь Игорь	Князь Игорь
Новый Театр	Травник	Травник	Травник	Травник	Травник	Травник	Травник
Московский Художественный Театр	Синяя птица	Синяя птица	Синяя птица	Синяя птица	Синяя птица	Синяя птица	Синяя птица
Альказар	Альказар	Альказар	Альказар	Альказар	Альказар	Альказар	Альказар
Синяя Птица	Синяя Птица	Синяя Птица	Синяя Птица	Синяя Птица	Синяя Птица	Синяя Птица	Синяя Птица
Зеленое Нольцо	Зеленое Нольцо	Зеленое Нольцо	Зеленое Нольцо	Зеленое Нольцо	Зеленое Нольцо	Зеленое Нольцо	Зеленое Нольцо
Федра	Федра	Федра	Федра	Федра	Федра	Федра	Федра
Бог Шести	Бог Шести	Бог Шести	Бог Шести	Бог Шести	Бог Шести	Бог Шести	Бог Шести
Том Совер	Том Совер	Том Совер	Том Совер	Том Совер	Том Совер	Том Совер	Том Совер
Цирк	Цирк	Цирк	Цирк	Цирк	Цирк	Цирк	Цирк
Цирк	Цирк	Цирк	Цирк	Цирк	Цирк	Цирк	Цирк

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## APPENDIX E

### PRODUCTIONS IN MOSCOW AND PETROGRAD, 1917-1923

#### (i) MOSCOW ART THEATRE

##### Season, 1917-18:

"The Village Stepanchikovo"	F. Dostoievsky
"The Blue Bird"	Maeterlinck
"In the Claws of Life"	Knut Hamsun
"At the Tsar's Door"	"
"The Cherry Orchard"	A. Tchekov.
"Three Sisters"	"
"Lower Depths"	M. Gorky.
"The Death of Pazuhin"	M. Saltikov-Shchedrin.
"Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man"	A. Ostrovsky.
"The Sorrows of the Spirit"	A. Griboyedov.
"Autumn Violins"	J. Surguchev.
"A Month in the Country"	J. Turgenev.
"Three Short Plays"	"
"The Stone Guest"	A. Pushkin.
"Fear during the Plague"	"

##### Season, 1918-1919:

"Tsar Feodor"	A. Tolstoy.
"Three Sisters"	A. Tchekov.
"The Cherry Orchard"	"
"In the Claws of Life"	K. Hamsun.
"The Cricket on the Hearth"	C. Dickens.
"Enough Stupidity"	A. Ostrovsky.
"Lower Depths"	M. Gorky.
"The Blue Bird"	M. Maeterlinck.
"At the Tsar's Door"	K. Hamsun.
"Autumn Violins"	J. Surguchev.
"The Death of Pazuhin"	M. Saltikov-Shchedrin.
"The Sorrows of the Spirit"	A. Griboyedov.
"The Village Stepanchikovo"	F. Dostoievsky.
"Ivanov"	A. Tchekov.
"Fear during the Plague"	A. Pushkin.
"The Stone Guest"	"
"Uncle Vanya"	A. Tchekov

##### Season, 1919-1920:

"Tsar Feodor"	A. Tolstoy.
"Uncle Vanya"	A. Tchekov.
(1st Studio) "The Cricket on the Hearth"	C. Dickens.
"The Lower Depths"	M. Gorky.
(1st Studio) "Twelfth Night"	Shakespeare.
"Cain"	Byron (1st performance, 4, iv).
"The Daughter of Madame Angot"	Lecoq (1st performance, 16, v).



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### *Season, 1920-1921:*

(1st Studio) "Balladina"	. . .	U. Slovatsky.
"The Flood"	. . .	H. Berger.
"The Cricket on the Hearth"	. . .	C. Dickens.
"The Hostess of the Inn"	. . .	Goldoni.
"Madame Angot"	. . .	Lecoq.
"Enough Stupidity"	. . .	A. Ostrovsky
"The Lower Depths"	. . .	M. Gorky.
"The Blue Bird"	. . .	Maeterlinck.

### *Season, 1921-1922:*

"The Inspector-General"	. . .	N. Gogol.
"The Blue Bird"	. . .	M. Maeterlinck.
(1st Studio) "Eric XIV"	. . .	A. Strindberg.
"The Flood"	. . .	H. Berger.
"The Lower Depths"	. . .	M. Gorky.
"Madame Angot"	. . .	Lecoq.
(1st Studio) "The Cricket on the Hearth"	. . .	C. Dickens.
"Enough Stupidity"	. . .	A. Ostrovsky.
"Turgenev Cycle"	. . .	.
"Tsar Feodor"	. . .	A. Tolstoy.

Since the autumn of 1922 the Moscow Art theatre company have been on tour in Europe and America. From the opening of the theatre in 1898 to 1917 there were sixty-one productions. Of these less than twenty were performed during 1917-1923. Among the missing authors are: Ibsen, Andreieff, Hauptmann, and Sophocles. And among the missing plays are: "The Sunken Bell," "Drayman Henschel," "Lonely Lives," "The Merchant of Venice," "Julius Caesar," "Hamlet," "Hedda Gabler," "An Enemy of the People," "When we Dead Awaken," "The Wild Duck," "Ghosts," "Brand," "Rosmersholm," and "Pillars of Society." A change to a more revolutionary programme is noticeable in 1919, when "Cain" and "Madame Angot" were produced: 1919 was the black year in the Russian theatre. It will be noticed that the M.A.T. only gave five pieces, four of which had a significance for communists. The remaining two pieces were performed by the 1st Studio. "The Cricket on the Hearth" is regarded in Moscow as a socialist play.

### (ii) THE CENTRAL CHAMBER THEATRE (MOSCOW KAMERNY)

#### *Season, 1914-15:*

*"Sakuntala"	. . .	Kalidasa
"The Playboy of the Western World"	. . .	Synge.
"Life is a Dream"	. . .	Kalidasa.
"The Fan"	. . .	Goldoni.
"The Pentecost at Toledo"	. . .	Kuzmin.

#### *Season, 1915-16:*

"The Marriage of Figaros"	. . .	Beaumarchais.
"The Carnival of Life"	. . .	de Buëlie.
"Cyrano de Bergerac"	. . .	Rostand.
"Two Worlds"	. . .	Tor Herberg.

## APPENDICES

### *Season 1916-17:*

- |                              |                |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| "The Merry Wives of Windsor" | . Shakespeare. |
| *"The Veil of Pierrette"     | . Donanhy.     |
| "Thamira of the Cithern"     | . Annienksy.   |
| "The Supper of Jokes"        | . Benelli.     |
| "The Straw Hat"              | . Labiche.     |
| "The Blue Carpet"            | . Stolitsa.    |

### *Season 1917-18:*

- |                     |             |
|---------------------|-------------|
| * "Salome"          | . O. Wilde. |
| * "King Harlequin"  | . Lotar.    |
| * "The Box of Toys" | . Debussy   |
| * "The Exchange"    | . Claudel.  |

### *Season 1919-20:*

- |                         |             |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| * "Adrienne Lecouvrier" | . Scribe.   |
| * "Princess Brambilla"  | . Hoffmann. |

### *Season 1920-21:*

- |                      |                |
|----------------------|----------------|
| * "Noël"             | . Claudel.     |
| * "Romeo and Juliet" | . Shakespeare. |

### *Season 1921-22:*

- |                                                                              |            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| "Phœdre"                                                                     | . Racine.  |
| "Senor Formica"                                                              | . Hofmann. |
| "The Sisters," Operetta based on a motive taken from the Commedia dell'arte. |            |

### *Season 1923-24 :*

- |                            |                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| "The Man who was Thursday" | . G. K. Chesterton. |
| "The Storm"                | . Ostrovsky.        |

Also pieces marked with an asterisk. As the theatre was opened in 1914, the full list of productions is given.

#### (iii) THE STATE CHILDREN'S THEATRE, MOSCOW

- |                              |                     |
|------------------------------|---------------------|
| "Mowgli"                     | . R. Kipling.       |
| "Le Rossignol"               | . Anderson.         |
| "Tom Sawyer"                 | . Mark Twain.       |
| "The Black Cross"            | . Hoffmann.         |
| "Joseph and his Brethren"    | . Biblical subject. |
| "Treasure Island"            | . Stevenson.        |
| "L'Ouris et le Pascha"       | . Scribe.           |
| "Children's Songs"           | . Moussorsky.       |
| "Krasochky" (little colours) | . Remisoff.         |

#### (iv) THE STATE MOVING THEATRE, PETROGRAD

### *Season, 1922-23:*

- |                        |                |
|------------------------|----------------|
| "Hamlet"               | . Shakespeare. |
| "Beyond our Power"     | . Bjornsen     |
| "Ghosts"               | . Ibsen.       |
| "The Chimes"           | . Dickens.     |
| "The Carnival of Life" | . de Buëlie.   |

## APPENDICES

*Season, 1922-23 :*

" One must not jest with Love "	. Musset.	
" The Tsar's Letter "	. Taigore.	
" Sans Souci "	. "	
" The Winter's Dream "	. Drener.	
" Above the Whirlpool "	. Engel.	
" When we exchange places "	. Gregory.	
" Fatherland "	. "	
" There are not always good things for the Cat "	. Ostrovsky.	
" There was not a Penny "	. "	
" Power of Darkness "	. Tolstoy.	
" The Hostess "	. Dostoievsky (1st production).	
" The Cherry Orchard "	. Tchekov.	
" The Lover with the Melancholy Fancy "	. Engelhardt.	
" Marriage "	. Gogol.	
" Turgeniev Evening "	} Collective work of the theatre company.	
" Wind, Wind on all God's World "		
" Kommissarzhevskaja Memorial Evening "		
" Bum e Ula "	} Shkliar. For Briansky. children. — Theatricalised Concert — created by the theatre company.	
" Cat, Goat and Sheep "		
" Under the Sign of Chekov "		
" Song of the Cherry Orchard "		

The Peredvijnogo or Moving Theatre was established in 1905. Since then it has produced 84 pieces which form its present repertory.

### (v) THE MOSCOW STATE THEATRES

#### *The Big Theatre*

*Season 1917-18:*

<i>Operas.</i>	<i>Ballets.</i>
" The Golden Cockerel."	" The Sleeping Beauty."
" Ruslan and Ludmila."	" Coppelia."
" Mazeppa."	" Don Quixote."
" Eugene Onegin."	" The Dancer."
" The Immortal Wizard."	" Vain Caution."
" Traviata."	" The Little Humpback Horse."
" Aida."	" Corsair."
" Romeo and Juliet."	" Love is Swift."
" The Pearl Seeker."	" Raimonda."
" The Tsar's Bride."	" The Swan Lake."
" Rigoletto."	
" Tales of Tsar Saltan."	
" Samson and Delilah."	
" The Barber of Seville."	
" Dubrovsky."	
" Sadko."	
" Demon."	
" Miniona."	
" Huguenot."	
" Manon."	

## APPENDICES

### Season 1918-19:

#### *Operas.*

"Ruslan and Ludmila."  
 "Eugene Onegin."  
 "Demon."  
 "The Tsar's Bride."  
 "Queen of Spades."  
 "Samson and Delilah."  
 "Sadko."  
 "Traviata."  
 "Aida."  
 "Rigoletto."  
 "Rhinegold."  
 "Romeo and Juliet."  
 "Lakme."  
 "The Pearl Seeker."  
 "Huguenot."  
 "Manon."  
 "Christmas Eve."  
 "Tannhauser."  
 "Valkyrie."

#### *Ballets.*

"The Swan Lake."  
 "The Little Humpback Horse."  
 "Jisel."  
 "Love is Swift."  
 "Vain Caution."  
 "Corsair."  
 "Coppelia."  
 "Stenka Razin."  
 "The Dancer."  
 "Raimonda."  
 "The Sleeping Beauty."  
 "Don Quixote."  
 "Nutcracker."

### Season 1919-20:

#### *Operas.*

"Queen of Spades."  
 "Ruslan and Ludmila."  
 "Sadko."  
 "Lakme."  
 "The Tsar's Bride."  
 "Aida."  
 "Tales of Tsar Saltan."  
 "Barber of Seville."  
 "Valkyrie."  
 Symphony Concerts.

#### *Ballets.*

"Nutcracker."  
 "Don Quixote."  
 "Vain Caution."  
 "Love is Swift."  
 "Coppelia."  
 "Corsair."  
 "The Little Humpback Horse."  
 "The Swan Lake."

### Season 1921-22-23:

#### *Operas.*

"Ruslan and Ludmila."  
 "Prince Igor."  
 "Queen of Spades."  
 "The Tsar's Bride."  
 "Barber of Seville."  
 "Eugene Onegin."  
 "Boris Godunov."  
 "Sadko."  
 "Tales of Tsar Saltan."  
 "The Snow Maiden."  
 "Carmen."  
 "The Mermaid."  
 "Lohengrin."

#### *Ballets.*

"Corsair."  
 "Don Quixote."  
 "Coppelia."  
 "The Little Humpback Horse."  
 "Raimonda."  
 "The Magic Mirror."  
 "Vain Caution."  
 "Love is Swift."  
 "The Swan Lake."  
 "The Dancer."  
 "Grotto of Venus." } Triple  
 "Petrushka." } Bill.  
 "Spanish Caprice."

There are two State theatres in Moscow, the Big and the Little. The productions at the Little theatre are mostly plays of a classical species.

## APPENDICES

### (vi) THE PETROGRAD STATE THEATRES

There are three State theatres in Petrograd: the Alexandrinsky, the Michaelovsky, and the Marinsky. The director of these theatres handed me a list in Russian of the productions at all three from 1917 to 1923. But when I came to examine the list after leaving Russia, I found it was badly and faintly typed, and many of the titles of the pieces were so abbreviated as to make them unrecognisable. The result is that a translation is out of the question. The following facts taken from the list can, however, be given. At the Alexandrinsky and Michaelovsky theatres there were, from 1917 to 1923, 111 productions of plays and 1,443 performances. Of the 111, 43 were new productions or revised productions. The plays were of partly a popular and partly a communistic character. They included several belonging to the Moscow Art theatre repertory. For instance, "Lower Depths" (21 performances), "Enough Stupidity" (10), "The Inspector-General" (69, twice the number of performances of any other piece), "The Sorrows of the Spirit" (comes third with 48 performances), "Tsar Feodor" (is sixth, with 34). "The Serf" takes second place with 58 performances. Some pieces which are now included in the repertory of the Moscow Theatre of Revolutionary Satire were not so popular. "The Death of Tarelkin" was performed 18 times; Martine's "Night," which is now known as "The Earth Prancing," was only played 8 times. Tolstoy's "Power of Darkness" made 12 appearances. But the list is chiefly remarkable as showing the great number of performances of serious plays in a city that has practically ceased to exist, during a period when its population fell from over 3,000,000 to less than 1,000,000.

The Operas and Ballets at the Marinsky and Michaelovsky theatres during the same period were almost the same as those produced at Moscow. There were 58 productions and 1,215 performances. Of the 58 there were no less than 43 new or revised productions. This result shows a good deal of activity. As a guide to public taste, take the following number of performances: "Demon," 54; "Prince Igor," 51; "Barber of Seville," "Queen of Spades," 50; "The Beggar Student," "Rigoletto," 46; "Traviata," 37; "Carmen," 35; "Romeo and Juliet," "Boheme," 34; Then comes "Fra Diavolo," "Boris Godunov," "Faust," "Valkyrie," with more than 20 each. "Madame Butterfly," "Aida," "Lakme," and "Werther" are in their teens. At the bottom of the list are "Samson and Delilah," "Mephistopheles," "Don Quixote," with 3 each; "Lohengrin," 2; and "Mazeppa," 1.

### (vii) THE REVOLUTIONARY THEATRE REPERTORY

There are now a considerable number of plays in Russia which form a revolutionary repertory. Most, if not all of these plays are published and thus made accessible to a very wide reading public. The list is too long to give in full. But here is a selection of representative pieces.

"Sunrise"	. . . . .	V. Alexsin.
"Marat"	. . . . .	A. Amnuel.
"Miners"	. . . . .	Z. A. Antonova-Chalaja.
"Comrades of the New Place"	. . . . .	F. Borovsky.
"Gold"	. . . . .	Bramson Karen.
"Spartacus"	. . . . .	V. Volkenstein.
"Liberation"	. . . . .	Vilie-de-Lil-Aden.
"Weavers"	. . . . .	G. Hauptmann.
"Day of Marat's Death"	. . . . .	A. Globa.

## APPENDICES

" Gas "	G. Kaiser.
" Slaves "	Lekli Johann.
" Revolution "	"
" The Redeemer "	"
" The Ewes "	Lope-de-Vega.
" Ivan in Paradise "	A. Lunacharsky.
" Oliver Cromwell "	"
" Chancellor and the Locksmith "	"
" King's Barber "	"
" Foma Kompanella "	"
" Faust in Town "	"
" Vassilissa the Wise "	"
" Night "	Martine.
" Mysteria-Bouffes "	V. Majakovsky.
" There, where Death is "	A. Okulov.
" Avenger "	V. F. Pletnev
" Lena "	"
" Incredible, but possible "	"
" The World Stock Exchange "	M. A. Raisner.
" God and the Stock Exchange "	"
" Three Temptations "	"
" How Ivan the Fool was seeking for the Truth "	"
" Sky Mechanics "	"
" If Capital Wins "	"
" The Prophet "	"
" Li-Lu-Li "	Romain Rolland.
" Danton "	"
" The Wolves "	"
" Lassalle "	S. Benelli.
" Machine "	Upton Sinclair.

### SOCIALISTIC PEOPLE'S THEATRE

" Daughter of Labour "	.
" Jubilee "	.
" Adventures "	.
" The Devil in the Ballot Box "	.
" Contrabrand "	Chalaja Zinaida.
" The Miner Kort "	A. Chunin.
" Whirl "	V. Chichkov.

### (viii) STATISTICAL CHART OF THE 1922-23 SEASON THEATRICAL RESULTS

	Bad Results	Medium Results	Good Results
Enterprises assisted by the Government, 66 per cent.	35 per cent.	50 per cent.	15 per cent.
Private Enterprises, 34 per cent. . . . .	71 per cent.	29 per cent.	0 per cent.

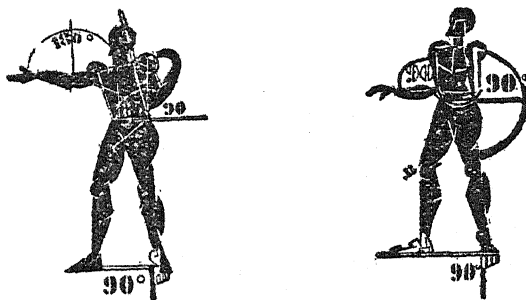
From " Zrelishcha," Moscow.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX F

#### NOTES ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustrations in this book have been chosen to follow the scheme of the book and to offer necessary explanations, especially technical ones. It is quite impossible in a single volume to describe at length the involved technical systems and processes at work in the New Russian theatre. But illustrations can do much to convey their nature and meaning. These technical explanations are demanded by a New theatre which is practically a new technique of the drama. That is to say, a theatre in which every thing—acting, stage, scenery, auditorium—is being reconstructed for a new technical purpose, namely, the expression of a new social style of thought and action which has developed since the Revolution. Each period of history has its manner or style. Thus there is the baroque, the rococco, the empire, the modern, and so on. To-day in Russia there is a distinct style known as the R.S.F.S.R. It is based on a line. Just as the rococco style was based on round and elliptical lines, so the Soviet style is based on a straight line. The geometrical principle of the straight line is the shortest distance between two points, and the R.S.F.S.R. style or straight line style is accordingly constructed on this principle.



TAYLORISED GESTURE in the Russian Theatre.

Two work diagrams of angles.

Actor pupils are expected to learn how to use their hands and feet on the above models. These two models show turning movements at 90 degrees.

In brief, the spirit of Taylorism—American Taylorism—has been accepted in Russia as the ideology of the new style. Taylorism is, as we know, a system of promoting the greatest efficiency in a worker. It is one that reduces the worker to an energy-saving automaton. This system is at work throughout the New theatre. A study of the illustrations, particularly those belonging to the Left Group section, will reveal the application of Taylorism and associated systems, such as bio-mechanics, to the work of the theatre, in particular acting.

## APPENDICES

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Two things become apparent, the search for:

1. The construction of a new movement (acting), which will prevent all waste of energy in movement and gesture.
2. The construction of new objects, also conserving energy, and built on rational principles, scenery, properties, etc. See the "properties" in the illustrations of the Revolutionary theatre.

Taylorism proposes that before a bricklayer shall lay a brick he shall be trained to regulate his movements so that they will be exact to the eighth of an inch. Likewise the new brain-and-body system of acting proposes that before the actor plays a part he shall be trained to estimate his gestures to a hair's breadth.

Salvini said that the actor only needed voice, voice, voice. The New Russian theatre says the actor only needs gesture, gesture, gesture.

Besides giving a good deal of information on the new mechanistic conception of the theatre, the illustrations reveal the influences exerted by the various theatres on each other, and the unity set up by this, which is a principal theme of the book.

Finally they give a very good indication of the path of the significant reform movements in the modern theatre in the past, present, and possible.

The illustrations for the book were collected with difficulty. Some I was compelled to take myself. The line blocks are reproduced from the "Zrelishcha" ("The Scene"), a Moscow weekly Left Front theatre journal of considerable importance, from the editor of which I purchased the necessary copies.

A word should be added on the theatrical News-sheets. All the Russian newspapers and periodicals devote considerable space to the theatre. Then there are several theatrical papers. Two outstanding ones are "Jezn Iskusstva" (Petrograd), which deals with the new problems of the theatre, and "Zrelishcha" (Moscow), the organ of the Left. The theatre news-sheets are of a very serious character. Among them are "Zapiski Peredvijnogo Teatra" (Petrograd), containing weekly notes on the work and problems of the Moving theatre, and "7 Dnei," the weekly programme and interpretation of the Chamber, or Kamerny, theatre's intricate productions.













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